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Review

Autumn 1989

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The Hudson Review

A magazine of literature and the arts

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TO OUR READERS

A book by an Advisory Editor of THE HUDSON REVIEW has recently been reissued. In accordance with our policy, this book will not be reviewed in our pages, but is listed below for the interest of our readers:

FREDERICK BROWN: *Theater and Revolution: The Culture of the French Stage.* Vintage Books. \$16.95.

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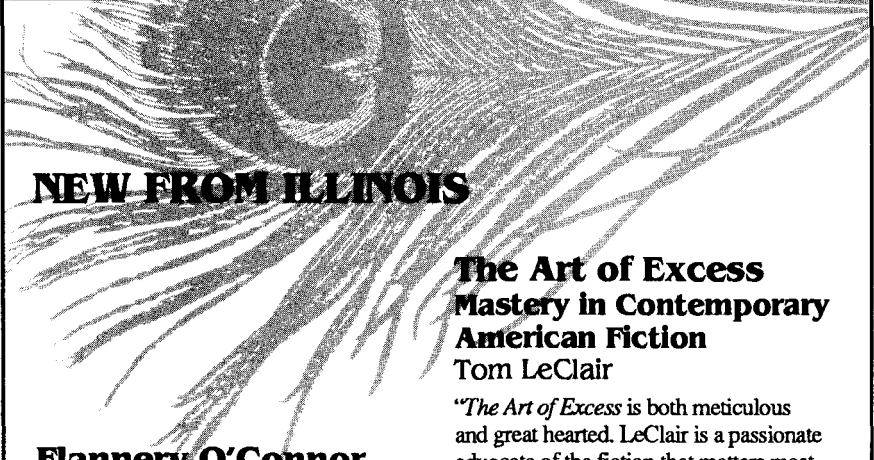
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Unsolicited mss will be read according to the following schedule: *Nonfiction*: January 1 through March 31, and October 1 through December 31; *Poetry*: April 1 through September 30; *Fiction*: June 1 through November 30. Unsolicited mss received at other times will be returned unread. Manuscripts submitted by subscribers who so identify themselves will be read throughout the year. Manuscripts will not be returned nor will inquiries be answered unless accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelopes. No responsibility is assumed for their loss or injury.

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Letter to the Editors

Dear Editors:

The aim of Clara Claiborne Park's essay, "Talking Back to the Speaker" (*The Hudson Review*, Spring 1989) is entirely laudable. She has correctly pointed to a central danger current in the teaching of literature—and much of the writing about it. Present critical practice does risk insulating the reader from experiencing the fullest possible human effect of the literary work, baffling him or her within a self-referential game. But before we divide into camps I would hope that we could define the lines of controversy clearly.

Need we argue for "naïve" and "unsophisticated" reading in order to save literary power? In order to "break bread with the dead," must we seek the work in which we feel they wrote *in propria persona*? We discover Ezra Pound in his "Homage to Sextus Propertius" in the way he interpreted and altered Propertius and in the way the mask of Propertius conformed to and exaggerated features of Pound. We discover Yeats not entirely in any single lyric but also in his vacillations from lyric to lyric. And even Walt Whitman, that great self-singer, late in his life distanced his private daily person from the "I" of "Song of Myself." All these poets meant what they said in their work, but they "said" what they meant in complex ways. The word "speaker" helps us accurately sort these complexities and so allows for more full communication, poet to reader.

When Yeats contemplated Keats and Dante he reflected on the sometimes unexpected relations that exist between poet and poem: "When I think of any great poetical writer of the past . . . I comprehend, if I know the lineaments of his life, that the work is the man's flight from his entire horoscope, his blind struggle in the network of the stars" (*Per Amica Silentia Lunae*). Since the relation of poet to speaker can be anything from virtual identity to constructed opposite, a kind of uncertainty principle must apply when we consider the personae we encounter in poems. Poets, perhaps, know this best, and they know the liberation of donning a mask, speaking through its mouth-hole. Paradoxically, they often can speak most personally with the mask in place. Eliot knew this. And, conversely, most contemporary poets writing first-person lyrics would insist that readers not naively assume the "I" to be identical with the poet. For myself, I published a long poem in *The Hudson Review* ("When the Magnitude of the Possible Dawned," Autumn 1984) in which I used the names of my wife and son, contemplating the fact of mortality and the terror of history. Yet I am not *exactly* the speaker of that poem and could not have completed it if I had not felt free to alter the details of my own

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experience, inventing settings and incidents, discovering as I went forward the truest nature of my feelings and reflections. I stand by every word and Aaron Bobb was a real child who died, but there was no garden, no retreat into the green chapel of a woods, no poking the fire with my son. The poem is, at least in part, a constructed fiction, and in it I found myself more truly and more strange.

M. H. Abrams is both hero and culprit in Ms. Park's essay. She praises him as a sensible, humane critic, but regrets the gap between reader and poet that his definition of "persona" in *A Glossary of Literary Terms* encourages. But elsewhere in that book Abrams directs us to the proper place for seeking the poet. Here is his definition of "Voice":

Voice, in a recently evolved usage, signifies the equivalent in imaginative literature to Aristotle's "ethos" in a work of persuasive rhetoric, and suggests also the traditional rhetorician's concern with the importance of the physical voice. The term in criticism points to the fact that there is a voice beyond the fictitious voices in a work, and a person behind all the *dramatis personae*, including even the first-person narrator persona. We have the sense of a pervasive presence, a determinate intelligence and a moral sensibility, which has selected, ordered, rendered, and expressed these literary materials in just this way.

Sometimes speaker and poet coincide; it is legitimate for criticism to treat both the life and work in order to discover the true relation, if it can. But I do not see that we must identify speaker and poet in order to make the poem matter. Whether we talk of poets or speakers, in the poem we are moved by the poet's making, by the motion of his or her imagination. I would hope that as we write criticism or teach we can register the full nuance and complication of poems and at the same time respond emotionally and imaginatively to their power. If I were a student, I would hope for the teacher who could both train in me the true sophistication of accurate reading and serve as an example of how we are moved by the poet's voice. Ms. Park, no doubt, is such a teacher. I would only shift the emphasis of her complaint. Poetry is robbed of its power not when we distinguish between speaker and poet, but when we despair of the very possibility of communication.

Decorah, Iowa

ROBERT SCHULTZ

Clara Claiborne Park replies:

I can't find anything to disagree with in Robert Schultz's letter, or that I meant to be read as disagreeing with. There are clearly many,

many poems in which we must not identify speaker and poet—more and more all the time, since poetic practice is not independent of critical habit. If to break bread with the dead we had to seek the work they wrote *in propria persona*, we could break very little bread with Shakespeare, and none with Homer; we'd be drawn into all sorts of enervating oversimplifications, such as identifying Stephen Dedalus (or Leopold Bloom) with James Joyce. I'm grateful to Mr. Schultz for redirecting my attention to Abrams on "Voice," and for the illustration from his own work of how lived and fictional circumstance may interpenetrate. The relation of poet to speaker can indeed "be anything from virtual identity to constructed opposite"; there are all sorts of ways in which poets can mean what they say, and the more fully we can respond to these the richer our experience. At any rate, neither Mr. Schultz nor I despairs of "the very possibility of communication," so perhaps in the midst of our sophistication it is still possible to hold on to our innocence, and to assist some of our brighter students, enwebbed "within a self-referential game," to recover theirs.

Comment:

Letter from Toronto

DEAR H,

I had lunch today at the Art Gallery of Ontario, with two invisible women for whose sake I had visited the gallery in the first place. My aunt Janette Pierce died unexpectedly of a heart attack at the age of fifty-seven about a year ago, and my friend Dorothy Roberts (whose poetry you have regularly published since the late fifties) lives three hundred miles south and is unable to travel now. My brief tenure at the University of Toronto where I have been a research fellow this year is drawing to a close; I'm preparing to say good-bye to the admirable library system and the jet-black squirrels that scamper around Queen's Park Crescent. But my sojourn here has been so consistently colored by thoughts of my aunt and of Dorothy that I felt in need of a ceremonious leave-taking that included them.

So I'm sitting in the elegant Member's Lounge of the AGO, drinking a cup of coffee and writing away on the back of long white order forms. Dorothy and Aunt Jane quite enjoy each other's company, so I can gracefully drop out of the conversation for a while; they're discussing the sculptural, totemic paintings of Emily Carr. Both are articulate, animated and possessed of a delightful sense of humor; Aunt Jane is wearing a pair of her famous three-dollar earrings, and Dorothy one of her lovely brooches. My aunt keeps posing questions with a journalist's intensity; Dorothy counters with a poet's unexpected insight, and her long familiarity with the cultural life of Canada. (They talked this way on the one occasion they actually met.) Writers themselves, they don't mind if I sit and scribble.

My first trip to Toronto occurred in virtue of Aunt Jane. She was a staff member (and finally editor) of the *Episcopalian*, national paper of the American Episcopal Church. Since she travelled a great deal in connection with her reportorial duties and worked very hard, she was careful about how she spent her vacation time. Usually she went camping in one of the beautiful, under-utilized state parks of north-west Pennsylvania or drove up to Stratford, Ontario for the Shakespeare Festival with a small subset of her seven children. But one summer about five years ago when I was in the doldrums, she kindly picked me up at Penn State on her way north from Philadelphia, and proposed to show me a bit of Canada.

Various adventures ensued: torrential rainstorms, a midnight visit to Niagara Falls illuminated not by the moon but by lime-green spotlights, a pageant at an Indian Reservation we were too depressed to watch and fled, dead fish and fancy pebbles at the edge of Lake

Huron, the purchase of an astonishing Chinese smoking jacket in an antique store. Wherever we went in Ontario, she was reminded of passages from the novels of Robertson Davies, whose strange blend of locally colored realism and magic she tried to describe, to my puzzlement. But the high point of the trip was our visit to the AGO in Toronto, where my aunt displayed an unsuspected wealth of knowledge about Canadian painting. She was a wonderful tourist; she never went anywhere, even on business, without learning something substantial about the world she passed through. Relations with the Anglican Church of Canada had often brought her to Toronto, where she discovered the "Group of Seven," and to Vancouver, where she discovered Emily Carr.

Back at Penn State, I took her to visit Dorothy, who also suddenly proved quite knowledgeable about Canadian painting, under the astute questioning of my aunt. I'd realized that Dorothy's brother Goodridge was a well-respected painter of the last generation, but never was able to put him in context. As Dorothy produced books and catalogues from hitherto unexplored shelves and corners, I started to see how early twentieth-century Canadian painters learned to exploit their formal debt to European painting, the decorative arabesques of *Jugendstil* and the expansive colorism of the Impressionists, without succumbing to its imperious example.

The Group of Seven in particular did so by bringing their painterly skills to bear on a new subject matter: the wilderness around Georgian Bay, Algonquin Park and the north shore of Lake Superior. They became campers, hikers and canoeists, environmentalists *avant la lettre*, through the great aesthetic (and nationalist) experiment that produced the most important of their works. Truly, the harsh sublimity of those northern woods and lakes, in combination with the courage and generosity of the painters' response to it, produced unprecedented, monumental painting. (And I have felt a similar selflessness and transport in Dorothy's nature poetry, though her poems belong to the hills and woodlands of New Brunswick.)

On my next birthday, Davies' *Deptford Trilogy* arrived from my aunt, and I lived inside them for a fortnight, finally understanding what she'd meant to say about them the summer before. Later, during my very last conversation with her, I mentioned I'd decided to spend this year at the University of Toronto. A week or so afterwards, she had died; when my husband and I returned home from her funeral, we found in the mail our belated Christmas present: guest membership at the AGO, offered with love from Jane. Each month when I get their newsletter (which I sometimes pass on to Dorothy) I feel as if I'm receiving belated news from my aunt. The correspondence is rather one-way; I want to write back, to tell her that I've got a room in Massey College where Robertson Davies was master and still maintains an office. I haven't actually encountered him, but I see his severe, level-eyed bust at the corner of the library stairs every time I

descend to use the public telephones. And whenever I walk through the courtyard I think, with a blend of local realism and magic, that I might see him stroll by in his long white beard.

So today I went back to the AGO, to renew our membership, see my favorite paintings again and pass a quiet moment, remembering. The permanent installation of the Group of Seven has recently been reorganized, and is now more thoughtfully lighted and better supported by written, audial and computer background material, as well as sketches and studies nicely arranged and made accessible in banks of shelves. Coming up the stairs to the second floor, I was immediately struck by a landscape of Goodridge Roberts which I hadn't seen before: *Georgian Bay* (1952). Roberts seems to have eschewed the decorative aspects of his predecessors' work; this view of Georgian Bay is studiously random and unadorned. The nervous, active brushwork of the trees and water in the middle ground is balanced against a deep blue, pacific sky. In the foreground, brush and rubble strewn on bare earth look almost calligraphic.

In the first gallery, two smaller oils of Goodridge Roberts, *Hills and Rivers*, *Laurentians* and *Small Bridge and Rapids* (both from 1940), are displayed next to work of his contemporaries and predecessors: David Milne, Lionel Lemoine Fitzgerald, Bertram Brooker, Paraskeva Clark, Pegi Macleod and Emily Carr. Four stunning oils by Carr are hung side by side on a facing wall, views of Indian villages which, with their haunting totems and ritual imagery, would be reminiscent of Gauguin if Carr's handling of contours and her reduced but intense coloration of foliage and sky were not so strongly idiosyncratic.

The next gallery houses the Group of Seven exhibit, with paintings by Lawren S. Harris, A.Y. Jackson, Arthur Lismer, Frank Carmichael, F.H. Varley, J.E.H. MacDonald, and Frank Johnston. Included as well are paintings by Tom Thomson, who died too early (drowned in a canoeing accident) to be officially included in the group, although he exercised a profound influence on all of them. The exhibit includes written excerpts from the journals various members of the group kept during their excursions into the northern wilderness, and culminates in three large, magnificent landscapes, hung together on the same wall, filling the room with the enigmatic pathos of nature untouched by rural or urban reconstruction, and yet surrendered to the human eye.

On the right is Lawren Harris' *Above Lake Superior* (1922), in which half a dozen trees, denuded by forest fire, stand before a somber hill and cloud-striated sky. The cylindrical forms of trees and clouds recall Leger, but the gaping, stripped and yet wholly successful composition, and the breathing mortality of the landscape, are wholly Harris' invention. On the left is J. E. H. MacDonald's *Fall, Montreal River* (1920), an audaciously dynamic and brilliantly colored view of sinuous rapids and shimmering hillsides.

In the center stands the painting I love the most, whose radiantly

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Tom Thomson
THE WEST WIND (1917)
Oil on canvas

Courtesy: Art Gallery of Ontario
Gift of the Canadian Club of Toronto,
1926

muted colors no reproduction can ever capture. Like the Titians I go back and back to in Europe, this painting demands regular pilgrimages and never fails to enchant me with each apparition. It is Tom Thomson's *The West Wind* (1916-17). Study of *Jugendstil* decoration surely taught him how to handle the simplified and alluring curves of a group of wind-stunted pine trees in the foreground, and Impressionism inspired the mottled sky and water behind. But the combination of stylized linearity and impressionist light play is utterly novel, and the stressed distortion of the trees, the wildness of water, were his own discovery in the face of a fatally compelling nature that would very soon claim his life. Growing out of a shore of invented purple, green, red and ochre, the trees form a sort of rood screen that organizes and includes the chaos of turbulent water and air, savage divinities rising up behind them.

So I sat and mused, and then walked over to get lunch, and take up the conversation with my invisible companions. How odd friendship is, that continues in spite of immediate and endless absences. Two women often guided me around Toronto, though one was indisposed at home, and the other was gone. Aunt Jane assured me that she still has an address, though I won't be able to write it down. Dorothy reminded me of the last stanza in her poem "Dazzle," that praises the truth of appearances, the interchange of light and shadow:

Light plays with the chorus of the living
While the dead hurry down
Earthward to lift to the dazzle
Any answering form.

EMILY GROSHOLZ



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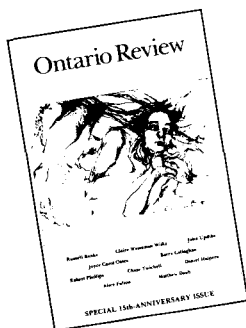
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Tocqueville in 1989

Just two hundred years ago, the American government began full constitutional operation with the meeting of the first Congress in March and the inauguration of President Washington in April 1789. The elections of 1988, as well as these bicentennials in 1989, have provided insistent occasions for reappraisal of our institutions. The appearance in translation of an authoritative new biography of Tocqueville¹ makes especially appropriate a reconsideration of his perspective on these matters. The central motive of Tocqueville's whole career both as writer and as statesman may be described as the need to interpret and reconcile the two great events of 1789—the French Revolution and the beginning of the American government that he saw in action some forty years later.

That a young French aristocrat who spent only nine months in the United States (1831-32), ostensibly to investigate the penal system, should produce at the age of thirty what is still the most penetrating interpretation of American government and society seems wildly improbable. Tocqueville was remarkable, however, in being both an aristocrat and a convinced democrat, believing firmly in the principles of the French Revolution as he interpreted it. Trained as a lawyer but not legalistic, he was essentially a philosopher, large-minded but realistic and shrewd. In the study of the American penal system which was the first result of his visit, Tocqueville professed no belief in rehabilitation: the purpose of imprisonment was punishment and discipline (but always humane). Tocqueville's purpose in *Democracy in America* was not to judge the civilization of the United States in comparison with others, but to consider the United States as the first experiment in democracy made on a

¹ TOCQUEVILLE: A BIOGRAPHY, by *André Jardin*. Trans. by Lydia Davis. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. \$35.00. (Originally published in French by Éditions Hachette, Paris, 1984.)

large scale and with a fresh start. The United States was a stable democratic society, in contrast to the French, which had been floundering for over forty years in transition, reacting from revolution to restoration. England in the same period was beginning a peaceful transition through the first Reform Bill, though to a moneyed aristocracy rather than a true democracy. The United States was the one example of a free and ordered democratic society.

Why was the American electorate in 1988 so moved by the apparently trivial issues of prayer and the Pledge of Allegiance in the schools? As Tocqueville observed in 1835, patriotism, education, and respect for religion are essential bonds in America, replacing other ties: "I do not know whether all the Americans have a sincere faith in their religion, for who can search the human heart? but I am certain that they hold it to be indispensable to the maintenance of republican institutions. . . . The Americans combine the notions of Christianity and of liberty so intimately in their minds that it is impossible to make them conceive the one without the other. . . . Upon my arrival in the United States, the religious aspect of the country was the first thing that struck my attention. . . . In France I had almost always seen the spirit of religion and the spirit of freedom pursuing courses diametrically opposed to each other; but in America I found that they were intimately united, and that they reigned in common over the same country. . . ."²

Tocqueville also noted the intimate connection of religion with education ("in America religion is the road to knowledge") and of both with morality: "In the United States religion exercises but little influence upon the laws and upon the details of public opinion, but it directs the manners of the community, and by regulating domestic life it regulates the State. . . . There is certainly no country in the world where the tie of marriage is so much respected as in America, or where conjugal happiness is more highly or worthily appreciated." The accuracy of these observations was demonstrated again when in 1988 two of the Democratic candidates were forced to drop out of the race (to

² *Democracy in America*, trans. by Henry Reeve, ed. by Henry Steele Commager (New York, 1947), pp. 200-203. (The translation, like the original, was first published in two volumes, 1835 and 1840.)

the puzzlement of Europeans) because it appeared that one was guilty of flagrant adultery and the other of obvious plagiarism. But, more importantly, the election showed that there appears to be still much truth in Tocqueville's observation that democracies, except in great emergencies, tend to elect mediocrities to govern them. There was a pathetic tendency in the 1988 debates for all candidates to invoke Kennedy, the last president to be widely regarded as having claims to heroism. But the most alarming result of the 1988 election was its demonstration of the power of the mass media, especially the use of TV commercials to simplify and distort complex issues. Tocqueville was extremely aware of the pressures toward uniformity inherent in democracy, endangering the independence and privacy, as well as the diversity, of individuals. He feared the power of centralized and potentially despotic government; and he was right in identifying it as the greatest danger.

André Jardin writes under the most impressive official auspices: he is the general editor of the thirty-volume *Complete Works* of Tocqueville, and he undertook this biography at the suggestion and with the help of the Tocqueville family. Nevertheless, his book has none of the piety or cautious dullness that might be feared under such circumstances. While he makes no sensational revelations about his subject, he paints a realistic and moving portrait of him. Tocqueville was an astonishing genius as philosophical historian and sociologist, but a strange, enigmatic, and in some ways unfortunate person: small, physically frail and often sick, deeply concerned with practical politics but a poor speaker and uncomfortable fraternizer; convinced of the need for religious belief but unable himself to believe; married to an ugly middle-class Englishwoman at least six years his senior. (The marriage appears to have been surprisingly satisfactory.)

Jardin is not exciting; he is more concerned to establish the facts than to interpret Tocqueville's character or his relations to others. He leaves without speculation such enigmas as Tocqueville's marriage or his relations with his father, whose conservative and legitimist books he avoided commenting on; he dodged his father's request for help in getting them reviewed. But his account of Tocqueville's career as practical politician is especially valuable: Tocqueville was both unlucky

and limited by his own defects, but he tried. He was a hard-working legislator in the Chamber of Deputies from 1839 to 1851, and was briefly, in 1849, Minister of Foreign Affairs—though even this was a disappointment, because he had wanted the Ministry of Education; and after Louis-Napoléon's coup, he refused to serve the authoritarian Empire.

As to Tocqueville's aims in French politics, Jardin says that he wanted a liberal monarchy founded on individual liberties, national representation, free and public parliamentary debate, and freedom of the press. It is significant that Tocqueville was against socialism in 1848: it was, he said, based on the worship of material goods, the abolition of private property, and the suppression of individual liberty. "It was as remote as possible from the values exalted by the French revolution. The Revolution of 1848 would deny the ideas of 1789 if it established socialism." Obviously, Tocqueville was at the opposite pole from Marxist or other Utopians.

Jardin is also illuminating on Tocqueville's later historical work, *L'Ancien Régime et la Révolution* (1856), sometimes neglected because overshadowed by the great *Democracy in America*. In *L'Ancien Régime*, Tocqueville denied that the Revolution was either an anarchic revolt or an anti-Christian crusade. The *philosophes* wanted to "substitute simple, elementary rules deriving from reason and from natural law for the complex, traditional customs that ruled the society of their time." And since the Church rested on tradition, and remained tied to the powers that be, they attacked the Church. *L'Ancien Régime*, Jardin says, was an implicit manifesto against the worship of authority and the worship of money.

The basis both of Tocqueville's success in interpreting America and of his frustration in practical French politics is his profound duality of feeling about the old order, revolution, and democracy. Tocqueville was himself an aristocrat (though he refused to use his title of Comte), member of an ancient family with a strong tradition of public service. His chief aristocratic qualities were a powerful sense of the obligation to preserve not privileges but duties, and a keen awareness of the complexity and possible value of tradition, as against the *esprit simpliste* of most revolutionaries. All his writing was practical as well as theoretical in that its purpose was to determine how

democracy might best be guided away from its dangers and made to work. Though Tocqueville went faithfully to church and remained nominally a Catholic, he retained only a belief in the existence of God and of a future state; in other words, like most of the American Founding Fathers, he was a Deist, though one sympathetic to, and nostalgic for, Christianity. (He remarked that the three greatest evils that afflict mankind were, in order, disease, death, and doubt.)

Since Jardin is not concerned to show the contemporary relevance of Tocqueville or to demonstrate his greatness, which (understandably) he takes for granted, I will comment briefly on a few of Tocqueville's most perceptive and prescient observations in *Democracy in America*.

Though, because of bad weather and appalling difficulties in transportation, they saw little of the South, Tocqueville and Beaumont (his traveling companion and, originally, collaborator) correctly thought slavery the greatest impediment to a happy future for America; it not only degraded the slave but also discouraged all activity in his master. But Beaumont took slavery as his particular province. He made Baltimore the setting of his novel *Marie; ou l'esclavage aux Etats-Unis*, published in 1835, which was an immediate success and went promptly into a second edition; Tocqueville wrote the notes which accompanied it.

Tocqueville was the first to perceive the special role of the legal profession in America. "The government of democracy is favorable to the political power of lawyers; for when the wealthy, the noble, and the prince are excluded from the government, they are sure to occupy the highest stations, in their own right, as it were, since they are the only men of information and sagacity, beyond the sphere of the people, who can be objects of the popular choice. . . ." "In America there are no nobles or men of letters, and the people is apt to mistrust the wealthy; lawyers consequently form the highest political class, and the most cultivated circle of society. . . . If I were asked where I place the American aristocracy, I should reply without hesitation that it is not composed of the rich, who are united together by no common tie, but that it occupies the judicial bench and the bar." The 36,250 lawyers who throng Washington, D.C. at present would undoubtedly agree!

Tocqueville is eloquent on the superiority of the American common man as compared to that of the other nations, and on the vital importance of his education. In New England, he says, every man knows the doctrines and evidences of his religion, the history of his country and the features of its Constitution. "The Americans never use the word 'peasant,' because they have no idea of the peculiar class which that term denotes." American pioneers live in miserable log houses in the wilderness, "Yet no sort of comparison can be drawn between the pioneer and the dwelling which shelters him. Everything about him is primitive and unformed, but he is himself the result of the labor and the experience of eighteen centuries. He wears the dress and he speaks the language of cities; he is acquainted with the past, curious of the future, and ready for argument upon the present; he is, in short, a highly civilized being, who consents, for a time, to inhabit the backwoods, and who penetrates into the wilds of the New World with the Bible, an ax, and a file of newspapers."

"I have lived a great deal with the people in the United States, and I cannot express how much I admire their experience and their good sense. An American should never be allowed to speak of Europe; for he will then probably display a vast deal of presumption and very foolish pride. . . . But if you question him respecting his own country, . . . his language will become as clear and as precise as his thoughts. He will inform you what his rights are, and by what means he exercises them; he will be able to point out the customs which obtain in the political world." He learns this not from books, but from "participating in the act of legislation; and he takes a lesson in the forms of government from governing."

South America, says Tocqueville, with equal natural advantages, has been unable to maintain democratic institutions. "There are . . . no nations upon the face of the earth more miserable than those of South America." This observation seems, unfortunately, as true as ever, especially if we include Central America. Mexico, he says, has adopted democratic laws, but is unable to accustom itself to the government of democracy; so the question is not primarily one of laws but of customs, opinions, and all the details of daily life.

Unlike romantic primitivists (often French) who portrayed

Americans as naturally good, noble, and innocent, or condescending Englishmen who thought them savages or criminals, Tocqueville considers Americans to be fundamentally the same as Europeans. His interest is sharply focussed on the effect on them of democracy. "In America the same passions are to be met with as in Europe; some originating in human nature, others in the democratic condition of society. Thus in the United States I found that restlessness of heart which is natural to men, when all ranks are nearly equal and the chances of elevation are the same to all. I found the democratic feeling of envy expressed under a thousand different forms. . . . I inferred that in America men are liable to the same feelings and the same absurdities as among ourselves." But he discovered that the Americans "had made great and successful efforts to counteract these imperfections of human nature, and to correct the natural defects of democracy."

The passion for wealth is honored in America, he notes, while the military is scorned except in time of war: "The American lauds as a noble and praiseworthy ambition what our own forefathers in the Middle Ages stigmatized as servile cupidity, just as he treats as a blind and barbarous frenzy that ardor of conquest and martial temper which bore them to battle."

When distinctions of ranks are confounded and privileges destroyed, when hereditary property is subdivided and education and freedom widely diffused, "the desire of acquiring the comforts of the world haunts the imagination of the poor, and the dread of losing them that of the rich." Aristocrats in Europe often have a proud contempt of physical gratifications; but not rich Americans. Hence their dissatisfaction. "In America I saw the freest and most enlightened men placed in the happiest circumstances that the world affords: it seemed to me as if a cloud habitually hung upon their brow, and I thought them serious and almost sad even in their pleasures. . . ." They are "forever brooding over advantages they do not possess. It is strange to see with what feverish ardor the Americans pursue their own welfare; and to watch the vague dread that constantly torments them lest they should not have chosen the shortest path which may lead to it."

As to personal relations, Tocqueville observes that while

Americans have “reduced egotism to a social and philosophical theory, they are nevertheless extremely open to compassion”; there is, for example, little capital punishment, and slaves are treated well. The English, in contrast, “retain the bloody traces of the dark ages in their penal legislation.” “When an American asks for the co-operation of his fellow citizens it is seldom refused, and I have often seen it afforded spontaneously and with great good will. If an accident happens on the highway everybody hastens to help the sufferer; if some great and sudden calamity befalls a family, the purses of a thousand strangers are at once willingly opened. . . . It often happens among the most civilized nations of the globe that a poor wretch is as friendless in the midst of a crowd as the savage in his wilds: this is hardly ever the case in the United States.”

His comparisons of American with English social relations still hold true: Englishmen who meet abroad are cautious and uneasy, because England is a moneyed aristocracy; “as the limits of aristocracy are ill defined, everybody lives in constant dread lest advantage should be taken of his familiarity. Unable to judge at once of the social position of those he meets, an Englishman prudently avoids all contact with them. Men are afraid lest some slight service rendered should draw them into an unsuitable acquaintance; they dread civilities, and they avoid the obtrusive gratitude of a stranger quite as much as his hatred. . . . In America, where the privileges of birth never existed, and where riches confer no peculiar rights on their possessors, men unacquainted with each other are very ready to frequent the same places, and find neither peril nor advantage in the free interchange of their thoughts.” “In a foreign country two Americans are at once friends, simply because they are Americans.”³

Discussing the arts, Tocqueville says that in an aristocracy, the artisan seeks to sell his workmanship at a high price to the

³ Though Tocqueville has little humor, he is capable of such nice ironic touches as: “An American is forever talking of the admirable equality which prevails in the United States: aloud he makes it the boast of his country, but in secret he deplors it for himself; and he aspires to show that, for his part, he is an exception to the general state of things which he vaunts. There is hardly an American to be met with who does not claim some remote kindred with the first founders of the colonies; and as for the scions of the noble families of England, America seemed to me to be covered with them.” (*Democracy*, p. 374)

few; in a democracy he thinks the most expeditious way of getting rich is to sell at a low price to all. But there are only two ways of lowering the price of commodities: to discover some better and cheaper way of producing them, or manufacture a larger quantity, nearly similar, but of less value. So, if he can't work quicker and cheaper, the artisan tries to "diminish the intrinsic qualities of the thing he makes. . . . When none but the wealthy had watches, they were almost all very good ones: few are now made which are worth much, but everybody has one in his pocket." The artisan strives to give to his commodities attractive qualities which they do not in reality possess. "In the confusion of all ranks everyone hopes to appear what he is not, and makes great exertions to succeed in this object. This sentiment, indeed, which is but too natural to the heart of man, does not originate in the democratic principle, but that principle applies it to material objects. To mimic virtue is of every age; but the hypocrisy of luxury belongs more particularly to the ages of democracy. To satisfy these new cravings of human vanity the arts have recourse to every species of imposture. . . ." In the fine arts, something similar takes place: instead of a few great pictures, there are vast numbers of insignificant ones; the statues are not bronze but plaster.

Tocqueville is astonishingly prescient as to the influence of democracy on language and literature. There is no literature in America now, he says, but when it comes, it will be different. Americans "live in a state of incessant change of place, feelings, and fortunes." Literature is considered a transient and necessary recreation amid the serious labors of life. So people try to make the best use of the time they can devote to letters. "They prefer books which may be easily procured, quickly read, and which require no learned research to be understood. They ask for beauties, self-proffered and easily enjoyed; above all, they must have what is unexpected and new. Accustomed to the struggle, the crosses, and the monotony of practical life, they require rapid emotions, startling passages. . . ." "Democracy not only infuses a taste for letters among the trading classes but introduces a trading spirit into literature. . . . The ever-increasing crowd of readers, and their continual craving for something new, insure the sale of books which nobody much esteems. In democratic periods the public frequently treat

authors as kings do their courtiers; they enrich, and they despise them." What better description could one want of the present literary marketplace?

Commenting on social and domestic relations, he notes the diminished role of the father. In aristocracies, "the father is not only the civil head of the family, but the oracle of its traditions, the expounder of its customs, the arbiter of its manners. He is listened to with deference, he is addressed with respect, and the love which is felt for him is always tempered with fear." But in a democracy, sons address their fathers with "mingled freedom, familiarity, and affection." The case is similar with young women, who, as in all Protestant nations, are more independent than in Catholic ones: "nowhere are young women surrendered so early or so completely to their own guidance." They are without timidity or ignorance; they know evil exists. In Europe "a certain degree of contempt lurks even in the flattery which men lavish upon women: although a European frequently affects to be the slave of woman, it may be seen that he never sincerely thinks her his equal. In the United States men seldom compliment women, but they daily show how much they esteem them. They constantly display an entire confidence in the understanding of a wife, and a profound respect for her freedom; they have decided that her mind is just as fitted as that of a man to discover the plain truth, and her heart as firm to embrace it; and they have never sought to place her virtue, any more than his, under the shelter of prejudice, ignorance, and fear." "As for myself, I do not hesitate to avow that . . . I have nowhere seen woman occupying a loftier position; and if I were asked, now that I am drawing to the close of this work, in which I have spoken of so many important things done by the Americans, to what the singular prosperity and growing strength of that people ought mainly to be attributed, I should reply—to the superiority of their women." This is one of Tocqueville's most prescient observations—foreshadowing not only the heroines of Henry James, but even our later feminists.

Tocqueville is convinced that democracy is inevitable and finally good; but he is keenly aware of what is lost by it. In the 1835 *Democracy* he sums up: "If it be your intention to confer a certain elevation upon the human mind, and to teach it to regard the things of this world with generous feelings, to

inspire men with a scorn of mere temporal advantage, to give birth to living convictions, and to keep alive the spirit of honorable devotedness; if you hold it to be a good thing to refine the habits, to embellish the manners, to cultivate the arts of a nation, and to promote the love of poetry, of beauty, and of renown; if you would constitute a people not unfitted to act with power . . . nor unprepared for those high enterprises which . . . will leave a name forever famous in time . . . you must avoid the government of democracy. . . .” But if you want comfort, and the necessities of life; “if a clear understanding be more profitable to man than genius; if your object be not to stimulate the virtues of heroism but to create habits of peace; if you had rather witness vices than crimes and are content to meet with fewer noble deeds, . . . if, instead of living in the midst of a brilliant state of society, you are contented to have prosperity around you; if, in short, you are of opinion that the principal object of a Government is not to confer the greatest possible share of power and of glory . . . but to insure the greatest degree of enjoyment and the least degree of misery to each of the individuals who compose it,” then democracy is what you want.

By 1840 he has become more fully reconciled. Because he believes seriously in providence, he commits himself to equality, to a “new state of humanity.” Rejecting determinism, he declares instead his belief in freedom, and concludes not with prediction but with exhortation. At the end of the 1840 *Democracy*, in language curiously prophetic of 1984 and *Brave New World*, he suggests that despotism is the greatest danger proceeding from equality: “Above this race of men stands an immense and tutelary power, which takes upon itself alone to secure their gratifications, and to watch over their fate. That power is absolute, minute, regular, provident, and mild. It would be like the authority of a parent, if, like that authority, its object was to prepare men for manhood; but it seeks, on the contrary, to keep them in perpetual childhood: it is well content that the people should rejoice provided they think of nothing but rejoicing. . . . Despotism, therefore, appears to me peculiarly to be dreaded in democratic ages. I should have loved freedom, I believe, at all times, but in the time in which we live I am ready to worship it.”

The question, he says, is not how to reconstruct aristocratic society, but "how to make liberty proceed out of that democratic state of society in which God has placed us." The greatest danger is that government "has become almost omnipotent, and private persons are falling, more and more, into the lowest stage of weakness and dependence. . . . In modern society everything threatens to become so much alike that the peculiar characteristics of each individual will soon be entirely lost in the general aspect of the world."

The sight of such universal uniformity "saddens and chills me," Tocqueville says, "and I am tempted to regret that state of society which has ceased to be." But God's view is different. "We may naturally believe that it is not the singular prosperity of the few, but the greater well-being of all, which is most pleasing in the sight of the Creator and Preserver of men. What appears to me to be man's decline is to his eye advancement; what afflicts me is acceptable to him. A state of equality is perhaps less elevated, but it is more just; and its justice constitutes its greatness and its beauty."

Our object should be, then, "not to retain the peculiar advantages which the inequality of conditions bestows upon mankind, but to secure the new benefits which equality may supply. We have not to seek to make ourselves like our progenitors, but to strive to work out that species of greatness and happiness which is our own." "I cling with a firmer hold to the belief that for democratic nations to be virtuous and prosperous they require but to will it." To believe that nations obey some insurmountable power arising from anterior events, from their race, or from the soil and climate, is false and cowardly. "Providence has not created mankind entirely independent or entirely free. It is true that around every man a fatal circle is traced, beyond which he cannot pass; but within the wide verge of that circle he is powerful and free: as it is with man, so with communities." The conditions of men will certainly become equal, but "it depends upon themselves whether the principle of equality is to lead them to servitude or

freedom, to knowledge or barbarism, to prosperity or to wretchedness.”⁴

As to Tocqueville’s doubts and questions about American democracy, some, such as the misgivings about slavery and race, have been answered insofar as history can answer. His larger misgivings about the decline of the individual and the disappearance of great men in the sea of uniformity are less easily dismissed. Few would dispute that American democracy has produced great men even in the areas Tocqueville was most dubious about, the military and the arts, as well as in government; though Tocqueville was certainly right in suggesting that democracies tend to elect extraordinary men only in emergencies and grave crises. Fortunately, as he also foresaw, the nation always responds to any call to sacrifice, compassion, or heroism.

But modern technology has exacerbated the tendencies toward uniformity and growth in the power of the centralized state. Advertising, especially on TV, increases the tendencies that Tocqueville saw in democracy to envy, dissatisfaction, unlimited appetites and expectations. The Reagan administration professed to be against the power of the central government; but it showed how dangerous it is to set government against itself, to deregulate and dismantle its safeguarding institutions while exalting commercial values and setting up free enterprise, unlimited competition, and profit as the supreme good.

Tocqueville’s dedication was to freedom in the full sense versus the extremes of right and left. Thus, while he strongly opposed socialism and defended the right to property, he was committed to equality and fraternity rather than to unlimited free enterprise. Jardin’s biography provides both the necessary background and a welcome occasion for rereading this great apostle of liberty.

⁴ As a believer in freedom, Tocqueville had no desire to prophesy, and is to be judged not by the accuracy of his predictions but by his success in diagnosing the essential virtues and the basic dangers of democracy in America. Still, it is notable that not only did he locate the central problem of the individual helpless against the power of the centralized state, but that he foresaw the rise of the United States and Russia as the superpowers of the future. At the end of the 1835 part of *Democracy* he predicts that they will divide the globe between them, and contrasts the American dedication to peace and freedom to the Russian emphasis on conquest and authority: “the principal instrument of the former is freedom; of the latter servitude.” (p. 243)

LOUIS SIMPSON

Villa Selene

June 16, 1988

My mother lives at Viareggio in Italy. Five weeks ago she fell and broke a thighbone. She was operated on and is recovering.

Yesterday Miriam and I flew to Italy, traveling by Alitalia. The flight was delayed at Kennedy Airport for an hour and a half. When we arrived in Rome we ran to catch the connecting flight to Pisa. We arrived at the gate to find that the plane had just left and there would not be another flight to Pisa for six and a half hours.

A man at the Alitalia counter assured us that a “telex” would be sent to Pisa saying we were booked on the next flight. And Alitalia would provide lunch for the stranded passengers. The lunch consisted of the cheapest items on the menu and proved to be inedible. We hung around the airport all afternoon. In running to make the connection I had lost my glasses—they must have fallen from a pocket. They were new and I had scarcely used them.

The flight to Pisa took thirty-five minutes. We were met by Renato Barsanti, my mother’s husband. He had also met the earlier flight and telephoned Rome to find out why we were not on it—Alitalia had not sent the “telex.” Renato had a taxi waiting. As Miriam had never seen the Leaning Tower he told the driver to take the road that went by it. It was the rush hour, around 6:00 P.M., and the traffic was heavy. It seems that every family in Italy now owns a car.

We drove for forty minutes on a road lined with trees, passing houses with yellow walls and fields under cultivation. The country is flat with a view of mountains. Dante speaks of them—he says that these are the mountains that prevent the Pisans from seeing Lucca.

Rosalind and Renato live on the long street in Viareggio that

runs parallel to the sea, changing its name as it goes. We went upstairs right away to see my mother. She was sitting up in a chair. We were shocked at her appearance. She is ninety-two or -three. Up to now she has been able to take twenty years off her age, but now she is in pain and looks very old. She is aware of everything going on around her, but is distracted by the pain and finds it hard to follow a conversation.

She wishes to be in New York . . . “to die” she tells Grazia, the woman who lives downstairs and works as housekeeper, cook, and nurse. But this is an impossible wish. In Viareggio Rosalind has nurses around the clock, one arriving as another leaves, and the doctor makes a house call every day. Try finding that kind of care in New York! The last time Rosalind and Renato were in New York they hired a woman from some South American country who made off with as much of Rosalind’s jewelry as she could lay her hands on.

For dinner on our first evening in Viareggio, Renato took us to Ristorante Tito del Molo, at the far end of the street. Tito’s has a wonderful menu—we began with a seafood antipasto. The service at Tito’s is also wonderful—Renato’s friend, l’Avvocato (the Lawyer), calls it “the choreography.” But Miriam and I were too tired. This was a pity, for Tito’s is also extremely expensive.

June 17

Grazia made breakfast for us, but we shall be taking our other meals out—Grazia has her hands full. As she says, the villa is like a clinic.

Miriam and I went walking on Viale Carducci, as the street is called at this point. The side on which the villa stands, facing the sea, has residences and hotels. There is a median strip with palm trees. The side next the sea is lined with eating places, bathing establishments, and shops. Some of the names have changed since I was here last—there is now a Mondo Disco. But the street, says Renato, never changes.

Later in the morning we sat and talked with Rosalind. Besides the pain in her legs she is tormented by a burning and itching of the skin.

Renato took us to a restaurant, Montecatini, for lunch, and

left us there. He brought us back to the same restaurant for dinner. We are to charge our meals to the Barsanti account. The food at Montecatini is very good, especially the antipasto table with twenty dishes, mostly seafood, to choose from, and the prices are not nearly as high as at Tito's.

We walked back to the villa, about two kilometers. The Italians had just won a football match against Denmark and cars raced down the street blowing their horns, with the flag flying.

June 18

Heavy rain and thunder during the night. This morning sat with Rosalind while she talked, reminiscing about her life on East Broadway more than seventy years ago. The family lived on the lower floor. When someone brought her home she said she lived on the second floor because it had a doctor's office and was more prestigious.

She talked about Jamaica. When she went back years later Douglas Fletcher wanted her to see her old house, Volyn, and she went and looked around. It was upsetting to see the furniture of the people who lived there now. She remembered the name of my headmaster, Mr. Fraser . . . he wrote her saying that I would be a "star." Talked about her first job in New York, cutting threads on blouses with tucks—how difficult this was . . . she made holes in the material. Was paid \$4 a week—75¢ a day.

She traveled to Jamaica as one of Annette Kellerman's bathing beauties to make a movie. Annette Kellerman was twenty-five and had a "special relationship" with the director, and was jealous of any young, pretty woman. Rosalind was a poor swimmer, so a friend, one of the girls whose father worked as a technician, making statues for the movie, swam beside her and saw that she didn't sink.

Reminiscing about her life as a saleslady traveling in cosmetics . . . She was on the road in the United States for two years, then in South and Central America. Was in a hurricane in Mexico, on a high floor, the building shaking and the lights out. In San Salvador during a revolution . . . the city burning. The next day a young man asked if she wanted to go for a drive. She said yes. He drove to the hospital to see his friend who had been hurt the day before. She saw weapons on the floor of the car,

and he said that people were trying to kill him for his actions of the day before. He had brought her along as insurance! She told him to take her back right away.

Rubenstein paid her \$50 a month and another \$50 for expenses. She arranged matters so that she could come to Jamaica and see her children, on the supposition—which was unfounded—that she could do business there. It is terrible to be doing work you don't like and not see a way out.

We heard once more how she took the Clipper to New York against Madame's wishes and presented her with the idea of having a branch of the company in Venezuela. In Caracas she bought an old house. Things didn't go well until a tree in front of the house was cut down and she added a level to the building and a sign, "Helena Rubenstein." People thought that she was Helena Rubenstein. A colonel, a friend of hers, had the tree removed in the night by two convicts, otherwise it might have been impossible—trees were protected by the state.

Grazia made lunch for us today: pasta with a meat sauce, roast chicken, green peas, cheese, fruit, and coffee (espresso). Cooked by Grazia, served by Grazia and the cleaning woman, Giovanna.

More conversation with Rosalind, including one of her monologues about the money she has in banks . . . in Monaco, in Caracas and, now she adds, in Lucca. When the time comes I am to go to these countries and collect the money she has left in my name. But she does not say what banks. I imagine myself in Monaco, Venezuela, Italy, going from bank to bank and speaking to officials who, shrugging their shoulders, deny the existence of any such account.

After this session, however, she gives me an old address book to copy from . . . it has addresses of her banks in Monaco and Lucca. She has always been careful not to part with this kind of information—it is not a good sign that she is willing to do so now. I'd rather not talk about money, but if we are to talk let it be to the point, not these vague instructions. But she finds it hard to come to the point. The money is what she has to show for her years of hard work. It's not just money, it's her life.

She is continually in pain. There is the broken femur—a plate has been inserted. There is a "hole" or opening in her

back that has to heal. There is the itching of the skin, *prurito*. In order for her to urinate they have inserted a catheter, which is very painful. And this is not all: for years she has suffered from arthritis. And this morning upon waking she felt as if she were being suffocated by a weight pressing down. Miriam suggests that she has been too heavily medicated so that she can sleep and that they should reduce the medication.

In the evening Miriam and I eat at Tito's. I ask to see the bill though it's being charged to Barsanti. The waiter brings a strip from the cash register with a column of figures. I have an impression that they add up to \$200. Can this be possible? I should look at the figures closely but my mind goes blank.

June 19

Renato has rented a car for us, a small Fiat. He says that more of these cars are sold than any other car in the world. Miriam and I drive to Pisa where we look at the cathedral, the Leaning Tower, and the Campo Santo. I want her to see the murals by the master of *The Triumph of Death*. The *Inferno* with its bull head of Satan made a strong impression on me when I first saw it thirty years ago. We lunch at a restaurant with tables outdoors and a view of the tower with people walking around it. I once climbed up there but wouldn't try it now. I have dreams about falling—the Leaning Tower is a waking nightmare.

In the evening, at Viareggio, we walk to the Ristorante Montecatini and back. It is Sunday with lots of young people strolling and hanging out. A feeling of friendliness and young love in the air . . . a moon like the peg of an orange. If you're young the place to be is Italy . . . not bad for the old ones either.

Reading Richard Burgin's *Conversations with Isaac Bashevis Singer* . . . I agree with Singer about many things, this for example:

It's only the amateur who will take any topic. He will go somewhere, he will hear a story—something, anything—and immediately it will become "his story." The real writer writes only stories which are connected with his personality, with his character, with his way of seeing the world.

But Singer has narrow views. On verse . . . people no longer read it because poets have abandoned narrative and rhyme.

This is like the conversation I had with him years ago in Fort Worth. He came to my reading and liked it, but asked why I didn't rhyme. He says here that Homer is the greatest poet. When did Homer rhyme?

June 20

Miriam's advice about lowering the medication has worked wonders. This morning Rosalind woke without the feeling of weight and suffocation.

She talked for a long time . . . about purchasing the villa for the Engineer, Renato's brother Benvenuto who died a few years ago. She told Benvenuto, "A man in your position should have a residence worthy of him," and persuaded him to buy the Villa Selene, facing the beach property that belonged to the Barsantis. The villa had been allowed to deteriorate, but when she saw the marble staircase she knew that Benvenuto ought to buy it. She undertook the renovation . . . everything had to be done over, the plumbing, electricity, everything. She sent one of the carpets to an abbey to be mended.

Rosalind doesn't engage in conversation, she delivers a monologue. Afterwards Miriam tells me that she understands how I have been able to get along with my mother over the years . . . by ignoring her.

Once more . . . the story about Rosalind and Renato's trip to Israel. They saw a poor immigrant carrying a cheap suitcase made of straw. He had a dignified appearance in spite of his poverty. Rosalind sent Renato over to ask him, "Is there anything we can do for you?" The man said, "No thanks, I don't want anything." Imagine that! A poor man who refused to accept money!

In the afternoon Miriam and I sit on the beach at Antaura, part of the Barsanti holdings. We're received like royalty, given a cabin to change in, a beach umbrella, and deck chairs. But the water is too cold for swimming.

The sea is gray-green. There are rows of beach umbrellas . . . blue, green, blue with horizontal red stripes, etc., each with two chairs. The sand is brown.

There's a young couple next to us, the woman with a heavy growth of hair under her arms . . . unAmerican. I talk to the

young man and he says that his father is a friend of Renato and Renato's brother, Giorgio. Italy is just one big family.

I am reading Seamus Heaney's poems in order to write the article promised to a man in Ireland. I began at the beginning, with *Poems 1965–1975*.

A black man walks by with a case of sunglasses, watches, and purses. We decline to buy. The black men on the beach at Viareggio are very black . . . like the Africans you used to see in children's books.

I have an idea for the article that may not work out . . . an outsider's, that is, non-Irishman's view. I would examine Heaney's poetry to see if it can be detached from references to a particular culture. Is there "pure poetry"? Such thinking would be opposed to Williams' theory of "locality." I may decide, after all, that poetry is always "married to earth," as Williams, John Dewey, and Keyserling thought.

We plan to have lunch at Lidino, the bathing establishment next to Antaura. Grazia comes down to the beach to tell us to charge the meal to Barsanti. It's a good lunch: a platter of fried fish, mixed—shrimp, eel, calamari, etc.—with French fries, a lettuce salad, and wine. The waiter brings effervescent white wine instead of the "non frizzante" we ordered, but we drink it anyway. I mention the mistake to the waitress, and the waiter turns up with two bottles of non-effervescent wine for us to choose from. We have to persuade him that we don't need them now. Miriam has ice cream and we both have espressos. The waiter puts Miriam's coffee into her ice cream and this is very good.

I keep thinking about the murals in the Campo Santo. They were painted in the late fourteenth century, at the time of the Black Death. *The Triumph of Death* is a warning, with envy and malice behind it, to the people who are having a good time, listening to music, riding palfreys, and so on. There are three open coffins with putrefying bodies over which snakes or worms are crawling. Some ladies on horseback are looking into the coffins and one is holding her nose.

In the *Universal Judgement* there are some nasty surprises on the faces of the kings, nobles, and priests who are being rejected and sent to Hell. The *Inferno*, as I've said, is my favorite. The damned are being pushed or dragged to the mouth of a dragon, with demons gnawing on them as they go.

On the hide of the “bovine Satan” are what look like suction cups—they appear to have been derived from the octopus. After these scenes living in a cave in North Africa comes as a relief—it’s possible to avoid Hell if you live like a hermit. See how abjectly the two demons make off when the holy father rejects their temptations of wine, women, and song!

Over lunch Miriam and I discuss the difference between a hallucination and an apparition. The ghost in *Hamlet* is an apparition—it is seen by several people. A hallucination is subjective. I tell Miriam that she was an apparition.

It was in Darien, Connecticut. I had given a poetry reading and was trying to sign books with one hand and hold a glass of wine in the other. A voice said, “I’ll hold that for you,” and a hand took the glass. Then I couldn’t find the top of my pen and was clapping a hand to my pockets. The voice said, “There’s one you haven’t tried yet.” I turned, and the hand pointed to my breast pocket. The pen top was in it. I looked at the owner of the hand and voice—she wasn’t only gifted with second sight, she was beautiful.

For Outstanding Merit

There were six Barsanti brothers. The family owned extensive property in Viareggio. During the war it was confiscated by Mussolini. They got it back after the war, but now they were poor—their only income came from Giorgio’s playing football. He was an international football star and contributed from his earnings to the support of his mother and brothers.

Renato Barsanti was tall, good-looking, and a snappy dresser. He escorted the most beautiful ladies and dined in the best restaurants. Everybody liked Renato. His oldest brother, Benvenuto, was short and ugly—no woman would look at him twice. But Benvenuto was good at his studies; he studied hard and became an engineer.

Benvenuto and Renato went to South America to seek their fortune. They started in the Argentine where Benvenuto imported Italian labor and built roads and airports. Renato went to Venezuela and wired Benvenuto to come—the country was undeveloped and offered unheard-of opportunities.

Benvenuto made a fortune in the engineering business. He

had a fleet of machines in Italy as well as South America. Renato found a job with a beer company, but they didn't like him because he wouldn't put a pencil in his shirt pocket and comport himself like a clerk.

Renato applied for a position with Helena Rubenstein in Caracas. It was so that he met Rosalind De Marantz who owned the business.

The Engineer had a principle: no one should marry. He held a grudge against Renato for marrying Rosalind. Not that he didn't like her . . . he did, insofar as it lay in him to like anyone. And Rosalind had her own money.

When Rosalind retired from business she and Renato moved to Italy. They bought a villa at San Alessio, near Lucca, and named it Villa Rosalinda. In the years that followed Benvenuto would give Renato jobs to do for him in the Rome office of the company, and sometimes he asked Renato to come to Venezuela to help him in the business there. Renato was happy to oblige—besides, a man should have some work to do.

When Benvenuto died he was worth thirty million dollars. He left Renato the income on a million, \$10,000 a month, for life. But Renato couldn't touch the principal. The rest of the estate, a huge fortune, was left to Giorgio, Renato's younger brother who had not exerted himself for years, not since kicking a football and hitting it with his head.

Giorgio has no wife and, as far as is known, no children. He lives in Miami and comes to Viareggio from time to time, when he stays at one of the beach houses that are part of the estate. The house was once renovated with American appliances. When Giorgio arrived and saw this he had the plumbing and appliances ripped out and thrown in the street. The kitchen had been newly wallpapered. Giorgio bought some cans of paint and painted it red, white, and blue. No one can explain why he did this.

Renato owns a fourth part of Villa Selene. Giorgio cannot evict Renato and Rosalind, for they have lived there for fifteen years and the law says that if you have lived in a place for that length of time you cannot be evicted. But he would evict them if he could.

Renato feels badly used, after all the work he did for the company. But he is a lot better off than Fortunato, who was

Benvenuto's chauffeur and companion. Fortunato was more than an employee, assisting Benvenuto from the moment he got up in the morning until he went to bed at night. Fortunato lived like a gentleman; as Benvenuto's companion he was accustomed to "moving in the world," eating in restaurants and staying at hotels. But Benvenuto in his will left his employees nothing—not a thousand lire note to show for their years of service.

And Fortunato was out of a job. He drives a taxi now and feels rather bitter—he is a married man with three children.

In Viareggio, Benvenuto is regarded as a public benefactor for his contributions to charity. Renato had the idea and made the arrangements . . . giving the *Commune* an ambulance and three dialysis machines.

The Italian government made Benvenuto a Knight of Labor, and when he died he was buried in Viareggio with an elaborate ceremony. A certificate on the wall at Villa Selene reads as follows:

Ai Lucchesi Che Hanno
Onorato L'Italia Nel
Mondo

Camera di Commercio LUCCA
Industria Artigianato Agricoltura

Diploma di Benemerenza
conferito a Barsanti Benvenuto
"alla memoria"

nato a Viareggio il
22-2-1903 12-10-1985

7 Set 1986



Il Presidente

Frances Fratellini

The diploma has a floret with two tails hanging down and a seal in the shape of a shield. There is a circle of writing around the seal, but the ink is blurred and the words cannot be made out.

June 21

This morning we drove to Lucca. The *autostrade* takes some getting used to. Cars go by at high speed, paying no attention to the posted limit.

In Lucca we walked about the narrow streets, especially Via Fillungo, looking in the shop windows. I know Lucca well . . . used to come here often from the Villa Rosalinda, a few kilometers away.

We had lunch in an area overlooked by apartment windows with laundry hanging out, then coffee in the Piazza dei Mercanti. We went to St. Martin's to see Ilaria, the lady with the pet dog lying at her feet and looking up at her. Miriam said that our dogs don't lie like that with their hind legs drawn up, but when we got back to Viareggio we saw that this is how Tico, the dog at the villa, lies down.

Rosalind seems stronger. We had a conversation about her life in Jamaica. She doesn't recall how many years she lived there—she said five, but I pointed out that it must have been at least twelve. She married my father in 1916 and came to Jamaica in '17. She left in 1930 and went to Toronto where she sold Elizabeth Arden cosmetics, because some Canadian tourists in Kingston said they'd sponsor her.

This conversation was precipitated by my saying that when we were in Lucca I decided against our paying a visit to the Villa Rosalinda—I didn't believe in reliving the past. Rosalind said that once she had left the villa she never went back.

I am sitting on the balcony with Miriam. It's seven forty-five and the sun is still shining. We look across the bathhouses and beach . . . across Lidino, Antaura, Principe, Petrini, Lita, and Tirista. The sea is gray-blue and a freighter has been anchored on the horizon for days. A ship waiting to sail makes you think of leaving for distant places, for sights and sounds you can't imagine.

My child, my sister, dream
 How sweet all things would seem
 Were we in that kind land to live together . . .

But really, people are impossible! Here I'm living in a villa in Italy, and it's not enough, I'm thinking of somewhere else and bovarizing. It's as Baudelaire said: "Life is a hospital where every patient is obsessed by the desire of changing beds." Where, he asks his soul, would you like to go? To Lisbon where it's warm? Rotterdam with its ships moored on doorsteps? Batavia, where "the wit of Europe" is "wedded to the beauty of the tropics?" Shall it be the Baltic? The Pole where the Aurora Borealis shoots up its rose-red sheafs like "reflections of the fireworks of hell?"

"At last my soul explodes! 'Anywhere! Just so it is out of the world!'"

I have been reading *Curtain: Poirot's Last Case*. Agatha Christie is not the kind of mystery writer who creates a meticulously plotted and timed puzzle. Christie writes about "characters." But her characters are clichés: the hearty colonel, shy bird watcher, invalid wife, man-hungry nurse, brusque scientist, fiercely independent young woman. But though she deals in stereotypes the dialogue is frequently stiff and out of character. This doesn't do her any harm with the public who think in stereotypes and so don't think at all.

I don't envy popular writers their success. I write for pleasure, not for a living, and the pleasure comes of having an idea no one seems to have had or to have expressed in the same way. To write like Agatha Christie is not to have a life of one's own but to be always trying to please. You're at the beck and call of the public and have to provide the clichés it wants to hear.

June 22

Rosalind seems much better this morning—she's had a tub bath for the first time since her fall.

She talked about her life in Toronto. She lived at the Royal York Hotel, but being a single woman had its drawbacks. You weren't allowed to have guests—on every floor there was a man sitting at a desk who watched as you went to your room.

About her work at Helena Rubenstein's . . . People were

envious of her success and the higher salary she was getting, but Madame told Mr. Augenblick, "Leave that woman alone!"

A sign of her feeling better is that she is able to pay attention to others. She questioned Miriam about her background. We discussed the behavior of children . . . their unwillingness to write a letter. I said that it was due to the disorder of my private life, divorce and so on. My mother agreed . . . too promptly, I thought. Miriam said no, it was due to their nature at birth.

Rosalind gave us L500,000 as an anniversary present—tomorrow is our third wedding anniversary. She also said that we may have the still life by Braque. This will take some arranging, however. We'll need a letter from her stating that it's a gift—I anticipate all sorts of trouble with the Customs. We'd better have Renato's lawyer draw up a document.

On the beach . . . a procession of black men with articles to sell: watches, sunglasses, cheap jewelry. Some of them are persistent and stand there after you've said no.

I'm looking over Heaney's poems. I remember clearly his poems about the peat-bog people. I discovered the subject about the same time he did, by reading Glob's book. I was staying at Robert Bly's farm in Minnesota. One night he showed me the book and I took it to bed with me in the converted chicken house. The photographs of bodies found in peat bogs were ghastly and riveting. I wrote a poem about them. Heaney has written several better poems on the same subject. Obviously the Grauballe Man and strangled adulteress mean more to him . . . they evoke today's Ireland, the murdered shopkeeper and the woman with her head shaved for going with a soldier. As the subject is more real to him, touching him personally, he has more ideas and creates more images.

He writes about life on the farm, about whins, waterweed, and moss . . . about a cow in calf, eels crossing a field, and barley growing out of dead men's pockets.

It's strange to be reading about such things on a beach in Italy, with a view of brown sand, blue sky, beach umbrellas and deck chairs. A few yards away the restaurant serves *fritto misto*: shrimps, calamari, eel, whiting, sole, mussels, clams, crayfish, dried cod, and smelts.

But Italians also have work to do. Many of these people who

look well-fed come from poor families . . . and during the war, my God!

Shall we say that at certain times some people are lucky, and others out of luck? And that luck changes . . . that it's turn and turn about, and there's no right or wrong way to live, just luck?

I feel I should say something about life . . . but what? About people lying around in deck chairs, and about the poor. Can it be that those who say that money is everything—in Russia they have another word for it—are right? I shall never believe this—it's not true to my experience. There were days when I couldn't buy a can of beans, yet that didn't seem important—I was thinking about other things.

If the cause of Ireland's suffering is politics, it can be fixed. Or else it can't be fixed. Either way, there is more to life than politics . . . the feeling I have when I read something that matters. This feeling, that I can never describe, is the object of life, the reason we are born, live, and die. And it's the same whether you are in Ireland or Italy.

A woman goes by laden with beach paraphernalia, trailing two small children.

2:15 P.M. The black men who walk the beach with things to sell are taking a siesta. Two of them are lying under the wooden deck of the restaurant, on their sides in the shade.

Over lunch Miriam tells me that when she was a child her brothers, who were in the army, brought home G. I. chocolate, the kind that turned white. She was hungry—her mother was a terrible cook—and she ate it. This was the chocolate we wouldn't eat at the front even when there was nothing else.

After lunch I go for a swim. The water is cold but calm. The last time I swam at Viareggio there was a heavy surf and I went plunging in. There was a strong current like an arm that was trying to carry you away. To my left an Italian boy called "Aiuto!" I shouted to the shore and the lifeguards came out on pontoons propelled by oars, hauled the boy out, and took him to shore.

Then I saw my son Tony coming towards me through the waves. I shouted to him to stop but he kept coming on. I swam to him and told him to turn back, but he was a poor swimmer and unable to make headway against the current. I shouted again for help, and the lifeguards came out and put him on

their pontoon boat. When I came to shore there was a circle around him and a woman was scolding him in Italian for endangering his life.

There was nothing I could have done in that current to save him from drowning. I should add that Tony was quite unaware of the danger—he thought he was swimming pretty well.

I felt ashamed. When you are at the mercy of a power much stronger than yourself you don't feel you are being treated unjustly, you aren't filled with rage, you feel ashamed. It's shameful to be weak. Think how ashamed Jews must have felt when the Germans put them in boxcars and sent them off to be gassed. Some may even have felt they deserved it.

Before dinner we had another talk with Rosalind. She wanted to know why all those people in the Michigan book had written about my work. I said, "I'm a good writer." She said that she had liked my early poems but that I had changed "radically." She didn't see the point of writing about someone's painting her toenails—I think she was referring to the poem in which I had a woman shaving her legs. I said that she thought writing should be "beautiful" and take you away from reality, but I believed the opposite: as in a Chekhov story it should show the poetry in common things. She listened to this without understanding. Afterwards Miriam was angry—she said that she restrained herself from saying, "Do you have any idea that your son is an important American poet?"

Rosalind complained about her ailments, and complained about Renato's being from her side—he was downstairs talking to some of his friends. In New York she had him always beside her, but here he sat by her bed only one or two hours a day. He had business to transact with his brother, but what was that to her? She wished she had someone at her side all the time, the way it used to be in families. She quoted some woman who had said that she wished to die quickly with someone holding her hand. One of her sisters who lived in Washington, Ida, had been alone when she died.

We listened to this in silence. She was being very unfair to Renato, who has been devoted and self-sacrificing. In New York he couldn't speak the language and had no friends, but he did the shopping and learned to cook—Renato who always ate

in restaurants! When Rosalind had a fall he went to the hospital every day and sat beside her.

She speaks of him as having a good heart and simple, outgoing nature. Renato has more than that—his ideas are always interesting; he has experienced a good deal and thought for himself. He was never able to study like his brother, the Engineer, as he himself is the first to admit, but there is no comparison between Renato and his brothers, the ones I have met. He is worth more than all of them put together.

This evening there was a football match in which Russia defeated Italy. We heard a group of young Italians in the street shouting “Mosca! Mosca!” When the match was over one or two cars went down the street blowing their horns.

I asked Renato why. He said that Italians were good sports and appreciated football even when they lost. But it is one thing to be a good loser, another to cheer for the opposing team. I had a different idea, one that was confirmed some days later by l’Avvocato and his wife over lunch. They said that these young Italians were Communist supporters of the Soviet Union.

June 23

This was the third anniversary of our marriage. We drove to Florence on the *autostrade*. I had visions, as Italians drove past at a hundred miles an hour, of our marriage ending on the anniversary, in a ditch.

It was difficult driving into Florence. I had forgotten how big it is—for some reason I thought of the city as compact, perhaps because I usually came by bus and walked around in the center. But driving to the center was a matter of luck. The traffic was heavy and there were detours and one-way streets to circumvent. It was impossible to find a parking space, but happily we came upon a garage that would take the car for L2000 an hour.

We were looking for a coffee table with a marble top—this was to be our anniversary gift to ourselves. In the Balatresi Gift Shop on the Arno the owner looked up addresses in the phone book and gave us two or three. One was only a few streets away. When I thanked him he said that we were strangers in Florence and he was glad to help. We walked to the place of a marble worker he’d recommended. He was just as helpful, though in a

different way. He could make the table for us—he noted the dimensions with a pencil on a block of marble. On the other hand we might be able to find one at . . . and he gave us some addresses, one of them at Pietrasanta, near Viareggio.

Then we crossed a bridge and climbed the hill to San Miniato. The proportions, the roof decorations, the marble carvings, are superb—I think this is the most beautiful building I know.

It's hard to believe, but people have scratched their names on some of the murals. What kind of people are these? Where do they come from, and what can they be thinking?

We had lunch by the river, then went over to the Uffizi. Miriam doesn't care for the Botticellis. She suggests that the reason I like them is that I like the women in the paintings. I'm careful not to respond; it wouldn't help to say that I prefer her to all other women, of any type. She thinks that at any moment I may have a change of heart and even a woman in a painting could be a rival. This is the price one pays for having a bad history as far as women are concerned.

Seen in a street in Florence . . . three men in their twenties dressed as women, with high heels, stockings, brassieres, and earrings. They went into a bar on the corner. People were stopping and making remarks in Italian. Miriam said they looked like unattractive whores.

In the Piazza della Signoria they are digging up a buried city. You can see entire rooms that have already been exposed. In the excavation people are carefully brushing the earth away from the stones. They look like foreign students; they probably applied for the work and are doing it for no pay.

There was a lively controversy—some people didn't want the piazza, the heart of Florence, disturbed. But it's evident that there's another city underlying the one people have known for hundreds of years . . . one that was here before the Medicis and before the Romans.

If you kept on digging in Florence would you keep discovering buried cities? Where would it stop?

June 24

She was complaining again this morning . . . the old story, she

would rather be in New York. But there's nobody there she knows, outside Miriam, myself, and her sister Molly who has an invalid husband to care for.

I said that she was fortunate to be in Viareggio and to have Renato. But she doesn't want to hear this. She is suffering to be sure, especially with *prurito*, the burning of her skin. She complains that her skin feels powdery when she touches it, like dust.

There followed a scene from a play. The daughter of a friend of Renato's came to the villa with her child, a little girl of four, to pay her respects. The woman was pretty and intelligent, and when she told us she was a schoolteacher and taught English, Miriam and I were happy to talk to her . . . a living face in this mausoleum!

Rosalind grew fretful. She said that the child was bored . . . it was wrong of people not to consider how easily children were bored. I remarked that the child wasn't bored, *she* was—and, in fact, the little girl seemed quite content to be sitting with her mother till the visit was over. But Rosalind ended by sending mother and child away. The trouble was that we weren't talking about her—the only topic, it seems, that can hold her interest.

It is necessary to remind oneself that she is suffering. She has to be helped with the simplest bodily functions. Apart from the pain and discomfort, what humiliation! But when she finds fault with the people who are trying to help her, grumbling at the nurse, at Grazia, it is possible to forget that she is suffering. I find myself thinking that she is selfish and has always been. Not that she is aware of it . . . on the contrary. Everything she has done—moving from one place to another, running a business, deciding to live in Italy—has been for the sake of others.

I think that the belief in Heaven and Hell came from watching old people. If you had peace of mind you left the world easily, angels wafting the soul to Paradise, as in *The Triumph of Death*. If you still clung to worldly things—and Rosalind recalls, to the hundred, how much she paid for a gold chain years ago—you were tormented by devils. *Prurito* is one devil, arthritis another. And the more you cling to the world the more devils there are.

Then I remember that she is suffering. And in the copy of

The Dhammapada I left here on a previous visit, telling my mother she might want to read it, I come across this saying: "Think not of the faults of others, of what they have done or not done. Think rather of your own sins, of the things you have done or not done."

Miriam is distressed by Rosalind's telling the mother and child to leave, and by the growing dislike she feels. This is what really troubles her—she doesn't want to dislike the person in whose house she is staying. It is all the more troubling because she has liked, even loved, Rosalind up to now.

I tell her that the feeling of revulsion is natural and she shouldn't blame herself. But it may help to think of Rosalind's behavior, her wanting everyone to pay attention to her needs, her desires, to the exclusion of everything else, as another illness, like *prurito*.

June 25

Vincenza, one of Rosalind's nurses, knows a place in Pietrasanta that may be able to make our coffee table, and she goes with us so we won't be charged fancy tourist prices. The owner is a friend of hers.

Blocks of marble are being sawn and the air is filled with a soft white dust like face powder. The marble comes from Portugal and Turkey as well as Carrara, and in several colors, white and green and rose. We decide on white Carrara with gray swirls. The table will be shipped to New York and should arrive in six weeks.

We drive back for lunch at Torre del Lago with Renato, l'Avvocato, and the Avvocato's wife and daughter. Elisabetta is a sixteen-year-old schoolgirl, dark, pretty, and tall—too tall to be the ballerina she wanted to be. She had to choose between ballet school and a regular school that awards a teaching license—she chose to study for the license. She has been to England to learn English but cannot speak it at all.

Her mother is dark, bright-eyed, and vivacious. She wears layers of makeup to cover a bad skin . . . pearl and diamond earrings and a gold and silver chain with a diamond at the center. She loves music, especially "song," and has traveled to concerts in Yugoslavia and Vienna. We discuss with mother and

daughter the hard life of a ballerina. Elisabetta's decision to forswear it and become a schoolteacher did not displease her father.

We don't order from a menu—they bring course after course they think may please us. The owner knows Renato . . . everyone seems to know Renato. The meal begins with thin slices of fish in butter sauce. This is followed by *risotto con pesce, fritto misto*, beans—*pinto in olio*—and small shrimps—*gamberi*—with onions. There is ravioli colored with squid ink, filled with cheese and covered with butter sauce. There is fish on a bed of lettuce. Then comes a big platter of lobsters and giant shrimps. Finally there are chocolates, fruit, pastry, and coffee.

We talk about the article in a local newspaper about the Barsanti “dynasty,” the leading family of Viareggio and what public benefactors they are. Besides the ambulance and dialysis machines there is the villa with surrounding acres that used to belong to the Bourbons, the royal family of Austria, and came into the hands of the Barsantis. The villa has recently been donated to the Commune of Viareggio to be used for cultural purposes, but it seems that the various cultural organizations cannot agree how it should be used. In this, as in all matters pertaining to the “dynasty,” there are legal complications.

Another complication is the beach property, Antaura, Principe, and so on. It has been discovered that the grandfather left it to be divided equally among the grandchildren, but it was appropriated in its entirety by Giorgio. Giorgio is now being compelled to disgorge the part that does not belong to him. Anyone who thinks it's easy to be rich is mistaken.

At one point I mention that I was in Europe during the war, in the American army. This draws blank looks from l'Avvocato and his wife and daughter. People don't talk about the war, they'd rather forget it. It doesn't bear looking into . . . what your relatives were doing at the time. And there was no pastry to be had, no *gamberi*. The war was *brutto*, like bad weather, and now the sun is shining.

June 26

Read to Rosalind in the morning from Russell Baker's *Growing Up*. I had never read it and was dismayed to find that

the opening chapter was about his aged mother who had a fall and was in a hospital. She was senile and thought she was living in the past.

My mother's old age is different: she is far from senile—she has all her faculties but talks obsessively of the past, telling the same stories over and over again.

We hear again about her coming to Venezuela. She was traveling for Helena Rubenstein with a \$5000 letter of credit—she made them give it to her—and was in Caracas visiting important people. This was in 1945; the place was beautiful and, like pioneer country in the United States, undeveloped. She wasn't getting any younger—she was still attractive but a day would come when she wasn't. So she wired Rubenstein that she was coming to see them.

They urged her not to . . . thought she had taken leave of her senses. When she arrived by Clipper Madame Rubenstein refused to see her, but she persisted, and Madame finally consented. Rosalind had written out her plan on one page, and she gave it to Madame saying, "Please read this, and if you don't agree let's forget the matter." Madame read it and gave her the exclusive rights to sell Helena Rubenstein cosmetics in Venezuela.

She purchased an old building. She went from one drugstore to another selling Rubenstein products. The business grew until she had nineteen people working for her. Renato was sent by an Italian acquaintance they had in common. Renato was working for a beer company but they didn't like him because he wouldn't carry pencils in his shirt.

She and Renato didn't want a hole-and-corner relationship or, as it is described in Venezuela, "from one floor to another." So they were married, though it's almost impossible for an Italian man to bring himself to marry. They are fearful of being tied down.

They came to his part of Italy . . . Tuscany. She had always wanted "something special" in her life, and they bought the villa at San Alessio.

She talked, as she has many times, about renovating and furnishing Villa Rosalinda. I thought what a passion she has for furnishings . . . chairs, tables, mirrors, and carpets. I used to think this was terrible, but now I'm not so sure. She has told me

how, in Russia when she was a child, she took cardboard boxes and furnished the cellar where she slept.

The cellar was divided by a curtain—on the other side her older sister Lisa slept with her husband. She would hear them whispering in the night. And there were rats scurrying in the wall. Sometimes they ran across the floor.

She slept across three chairs. While she slept they would slide apart and she would fall to the floor. She picked up the bedclothes, pushed the chairs together, and climbed back.

Today is Sunday. There are more people than usual on the beach and the restaurant is crowded. We talk about life . . . these days at the villa incline one to do so. I say that the things we remember about people are not the things they pride themselves on, but some small incident, or something they said. Miriam remarks that it could be something unpleasant.

I remember, when I came to see Bly by train, his asking me, "Did you meet a widder-woman?"

Widder-woman? In Minnesota in the old days a widder-woman was hot stuff, like a "divorcée" in the thirties. Robert said it with the expression of a hick meeting a man from the big city, a knowing look . . . *We know what a feller like you gets up to on the road!*

George Ade knew: "Upon entering a Parlor Car at St. Paul he would select a Chair next to the Most Promising One in Sight, and ask her if she cared to have the Shade lowered.

Before the Train cleared the Yards he would have the Porter bringing a Foot-stool for the Lady. . . ."

The people in the street this evening are different, Miriam remarks . . . country people, couples and families looking awkward in their Sunday clothes. They are all shapes and sizes . . . here and there some member of the family with a limp or a hanging lip. Farm workers in suits that are too tight, housemaids on their day off dressed to kill, "toughs" who push into you without apologizing . . . the street is theirs on Sunday evening. The tourists you see strolling on weeknights are swallowed in the crowd of Sunday visitors, "villeggianti della domènica."

June 27

We've been worrying about our table. It's too long by ten centimeters . . . overwhelming in our living room.

Rosalind says you must never change an order once you've given it . . . this makes for confusion. It's one of her rules from experience. We decide to change it anyway, but not trust to the telephone—we drive to Pietrasanta again and see the manager change the specifications with his own hand.

Shopping in Viareggio . . . Miriam buys a dress at Max Mara for L145,000 or \$108. The dress is brown; she thinks that brown doesn't go with her coloring, but this is lively with some red in it.

We buy two crystal vases, one to be given to Vincenza when we leave for her help in negotiating the table. Grazia has admired Miriam's raincoat, so she is going to give it to her, and we spend some time going from store to store looking for a blouse for Grazia in addition. We shall give money to Giovanna, the woman who did our laundry and went so far as to press my underwear.

We are lying on the beach. Miriam is reading *The Dhammapada* and I am reading a detective story. The man goes by with his imitation Louis Vuitton bags. The ice-cream man passes, and the man who sells slices of coconut.

When we return to the villa I explore the disused third floor, looking for phonograph records. At the Villa Rosalinda, before Rosalind and Renato moved here, there were albums of fox trots and musicals. And opera selections . . . when she was a girl Rosalind wanted to be a *prima donna*.

I don't find records but there are suitcases filled with odds and ends brought from San Alessio. There's a smell of moldy leather. One suitcase contains photographs . . . a studio photograph of Rosalind as a girl, when she wanted to be in opera. Or perhaps when she was an extra in motion pictures. She is looking up and to her right, hands raised behind her head with open palms. She appears to be dancing.

A photograph of Rosalind De Marantz having lunch with Helena Rubenstein . . . each has a plate of salad in front of her. There is a story to go with the salad. The company was promoting a diet that featured salads. They put a big plate of

salad in front of Madame Rubenstein and a smaller portion in front of Miss De Marantz as befitted her position. Just before the shutter clicked Madame switched plates so that the bigger portion appears in front of Miss De Marantz. The expression on Madame's face, turned toward the camera, is of one who has her wits about her and is up to all their tricks. If anyone is going to be made to look like a hearty feeder it isn't she!

There is a picture of my brother Herbert and myself in Jamaica. I must be about four, Herbert is five years older. We are sitting together on one chair, Herbert holding me around the waist.

I show Miriam the picture and she says I haven't changed—there's the same expression. I think it's what Jake Barnes called a look of "eager, deserving expectation."

June 29

I am writing this on the plane at Malpensa—name of ill omen!—while waiting to take off. The flight from Pisa to Rome was delayed and we had to go by way of Milan instead, and by taxi through Milan to Malpensa. No one told us when we arrived in Milan that there was a bus to take passengers to Malpensa. This little diversion by taxi for two hours through Milan cost L100,000, not to mention a L5000 gratuity for the driver.

Yesterday we had a long talk with Rosalind, saddened by the knowledge that it might be the last. She is stronger than she was two weeks ago, and the *prurito* has stopped more or less, but she is ninety-two or -three. Her age is a mystery she has guarded over the years. When she worked for Elizabeth Arden and Helena Rubenstein she took years off her age. Once she even altered her passport. Recently this got her into difficulties with Medicare when she wanted to collect some money due her—the age they had for her in their records varied. She said, "Do you think I could have done business in South America if they had known my real age? Those people put your age in the newspaper!"

She talked about affection being the most important thing of all. The reason she had worked so hard, driving herself, was that she did not have a companion. (I discussed this with

Miriam later. She said that Rosalind was in the position of the teacher who marries a student. Renato was her employee when she married him, so she doesn't regard him as her equal.)

We were drinking tea, and she talked about drinking it in the Russian manner with a piece of sugar in the mouth. Miriam's father, who came from the same part of Russia, used to drink tea in the same way. There were some lines of a song Rosalind remembered from her childhood. Apparently tea was a rare luxury at one time . . .

"Tea," says the Captain and hands me a packet,
 "This here is tea, I want you to make it . . ."

She talked about reading Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. . . . As she talked there were flashes of the person she used to be.

Miriam and I had our last dinner in Viareggio at Ristorante Montecatini, *al fresco* in the garden. She had the *fileto Toscano classico* and I the *fritto misto* . . . to wipe out that damned Cohen. The day before I had eaten *fritto misto* in a third-rate restaurant.

During the night it thundered and lightened. Miriam says I made war noises in my sleep as I sometimes do. One night, early in our marriage, I projected a whole scenario, the sounds coming from different parts of the room. It was eery and she was thoroughly mystified.

The plane, a big 747, has taken off and we are above the clouds with the plains of Lombardy below, a patchwork of square fields and some that are not so square, colored brown and green. There are straight roads and villages with red roofs . . . to the left a broad, winding river. Now we have crossed the river and it lies behind us. The clouds have broken into puffballs with airy spaces between.

We are still climbing, for the houses are no longer distinctly separate and the fields have shrunk. A few minutes and we are above a mass of white cloud; through breaks in the mass we see dark mountains patched and lined with snow, and green slopes and valleys.

Loth to believe what we so grieved to hear,
 For still we had hopes that pointed to the clouds,
 We questioned him again, and yet again;

But every word that from the peasant's lips
 Came in reply, translated by our feelings,
 Ended in this,—*that we had crossed the Alps.*

In one of the old suitcases on the third floor there was a copy of Dostoevsky . . . “White Nights” and “Notes from Underground.” The first is all talk and a ridiculous story. “Notes from Underground” isn’t a story, it reads like philosophy. I seem to recall that Saul Bellow was much taken with it at one time.

But who cares about the ramblings of “a sick man . . . a mean man”? And his philosophizing doesn’t add up to much. “And so in the end, ladies and gentlemen, it’s best to do nothing at all!” This may have been provocative in 1864 but no one needs to hear it now. The introduction says that Dostoevsky was irritated with nineteenth-century ideas of Progress, with reason, socialist utopias, and the Crystal Palace. But in the twentieth century we hardly need to be told that Progress has its limits.

He heaps scorn on those who “reach out for the Absolute through aesthetics by claiming to ‘devote their lives to the good and the beautiful.’” He needn’t have bothered—nobody believes in the Absolute these days, and goodness and beauty have long been out of fashion.

Maybe Part Two will be better.

Yes. His wanting to make the officer step out of his way. Dressing up for a confrontation with the officer and, at the last moment, stepping aside. Bumping into him and being ignored.

The party where he is not wanted and to which he invites himself, and the way he is humiliated and abases himself . . . all this is too convincing. It’s painful to read. I put the book aside for another time.

The voice of the captain informs us that we are an hour and fifty minutes from New York. Below us there is a flotilla of white clouds, and the blue sea far below.

If I were a novelist I would write about my mother’s life. You would have to concentrate on certain episodes, otherwise the thing would spread out in every direction. Where to begin? When the brick factory that her father owned burned down and he left for America? When Lisa died of typhus and she almost died too?

The widow, Pearl, took three children with her to New York, leaving Rosalind in charge of the two youngest, to follow later. She was twelve or thirteen years old. How slowly the days and nights pass when you are waiting to go to America! She had taught herself to read—there was no schooling for such as she in Russia in those days.

She worked in a factory in Manhattan. The family lived in Brooklyn and she had to get up early to get to work on time or lose her job.

A man was standing at the street door, talking to the women as they came out. Would she like to act in motion pictures?

Would she! She took the ferry to New Jersey where the studios were, at Fort Lee, and stood in line with other hopefuls. She was given bit parts, and one day when the leading actress refused to jump from a bridge into a tank of water she took her place and jumped. They had to pull her out—she couldn't swim. After that she took swimming lessons.

She took dance lessons, riding lessons in Central Park, and acting lessons on 42nd Street with Mr. Koppel and Van der Loop. She went to the theatrical agencies and the Fox studio in New York. Then there was an opening: Fox was hiring girls to be mermaids in a picture featuring Annette Kellerman.

In Jamaica when you were a child she would take you with her on the afternoons when she drove to the Liguanea Club. She made you crouch in a bunker, keeping your head down while she swung at the ball.

She strode on ahead, the caddy following with the bag. The golf course was close to the hills. You could see them clearly with gullies running down their sides. A breeze had sprung up, rustling the leaves. It came from the sea and all the places in the world.

PETER CORODIMAS

The Unexpected River

Strickland's arm is in the air: he directs a fisherman, a young kid, really, not to fish so close to him. There is plenty of room on the river, he seems to be saying: no need to crowd anybody. But the kid is careless. He fishes too fast, and he's not listening. I feel like yelling, "Strickland got here first!" Strickland raises his bamboo flyrod and casts into the small pool where the kid has just tried to crowd him out. The kid casts there, too: the worm and sinker make a clunking sound. He has caught Strickland's line. The kid curses, and Strickland says: "You know, some people might not think it's good etiquette to fish the same pool someone else is fishing." Then the kid pulls hard on his spinning rod, and Strickland's rod bends, his tapered leader breaks. "You know," he says to the kid, "some people might hit you on the head with a stick for doing that. Then what would you do?"

"I'd have to kill the guy," the kid says.

Strickland seems bewildered. I can tell this is not the answer he expected. He is a thin, orderly man who hums eighteenth-century music while he fishes. I've heard him. He believes in laws, both visible and invisible, and this clumsy young fisherman is clearly breaking an unwritten law. Strickland stares at the kid; his dark eyes set in a pale, ghostly face could belong to a Biblical prophet. I wait for him to start yelling: surely he will call thunder and lightning down from the sky. But then he looks away, says nothing. He ties another fly to his broken leader, then keeps casting in the same pool. And after a while the kid is gone: he and his bulky quilted parka are just a red blur below the footbridge.

Weaver and I began fishing here early in October. Strickland discovered the river in mid-September, just as the salmon started to run. The poplars arching above us were still green then. Strickland said the leaves made a liquid sound in the

wind: you'd look up, he said, expecting to see another river. Others, too, came before us, but they are as faceless as the round stones rising out of the water. They come and they go. I recognize them sometimes by what they wear—a navy pea jacket, a hooded sweatshirt, a green John Deere cap.

We stand in bright swirling water, with waders fastened by suspenders. Belts around our waists prevent water from coming in if we fall. Nets and canvas fishing bags crisscross our shoulders. Whenever we move we push wading staffs into the current ahead of us; sometimes we forget that we carry a fishing rod in the other hand. We glance down and there it is, a surprise. This river and the Atlantic salmon that rise up around us are a surprise. In the past we've traveled to other rivers, even sought them out in fishing magazines, and now this one—so close to home that we still can't believe it's true—this one makes all the others seem unnecessary.

I can't speak for Strickland; I don't know him that well. But I think he'd agree. Before we actually came here and stood in the cold tea-colored water, the river didn't exist. All that time it flowed past our backyards—down behind the smooth green lawns of the State College where Strickland used to teach music; then a half mile later it dipped under the arches of a sandstone bridge close to where Weaver owned a hardware store. For a couple of years I ran a car dealership across the street from Weaver. From there, which is pretty much the center of town, you can see the river joining the lake. On one bank a statue of Samuel de Champlain stands above a granite Indian. The explorer extends an arm toward the sewage treatment plant across the way. The Indian's nose has been broken by a hammer; his mouth is traced with lipstick.

We like it here, where we are, upriver, away from the rumors of leaking gasoline, buried transformers, and PCB's.

I call across to Weaver and ask why it took so long to find this place. How did it remain secret?

"I don't know," he says. He unwraps a root beer barrel and puts the cellophane in his pocket.

"We were stupid," I say. "We missed out."

"What about the music professor?" he says. "He's got the Ph.D.—how come *he* took so long to find it?"

Strickland is fishing downriver, near the footbridge. He

stands perfectly erect, it seems to me, and his white flyrod points toward the sky as he retrieves line.

"We all could've been smarter," I say.

Salmon-stocking in the lake had been big news a few years back. We had all read about it. But we didn't realize there were so many salmon, or that they had been imprinted by water from a lake which fed this river. And we didn't know they would be compelled to swim this particular river every fall for the rest of their lives.

I'm fishing with a yellow and white streamer. I cast toward smooth water on the other side of a rock. I tell Weaver, "We should have paid more attention. Even this season, we should have come earlier. We're running out of good weather."

"Beware of goddam winter," Weaver says, so loudly that Strickland turns and his antique landing net swings in our direction.

Weaver means it, even though he's smiling. For him autumn ends today, October 15th, or tomorrow, because by then the wind and rain will have stripped most of the yellow leaves from the poplars. Sooner or later, winter will drive us out of here.

A salmon rolls over a few feet away from me, its dorsal fin skimming the surface. Then another clears the water like a porpoise. We are used to perch and small trout, sometimes a two-pound bass. *But not this.* This fish is eight or nine pounds, and when it jumps a second time, I can see the beak-like curve of its jaw. I feel as if something prehistoric has claimed my eyes. It takes the wet fly offered by Weaver. Weaver squints through his Polaroids, his face tight with fear. A salmon strains his line, and Weaver is not talking. He tries to steer the fish into the flat water away from the rapids; if he can do that he will have a chance to tire the fish by keeping it upstream as much as possible. The salmon jumps twice, and I can see loops of line running through Weaver's hand, then disappearing with a whizzing sound through the guides of the flyrod. His rod tip is in the water; he tries to turn the fish, but it's too late. His line suddenly goes slack, and for a while he looks at the sky as if he's been tested by a Supreme Being.

It is always this way, whether we catch the fish or not; the salmon come and go in surges. Although we constantly expect something to happen, when it does we are surprised. A lost fish

is only a temporary disappointment. On some days salmon crowd the river, and we are happy, it seems to me, to the point of fear.

In trying to make up for lost time, I come to the river every day. Weaver fishes when he feels like it. Since his apartment is just a few blocks away, he sometimes walks over. Strickland usually arrives before us. I park near the footbridge, within sight of the college soccer field, and Strickland's red van is already there. I get out, put on my waders and stuff, lock up, and then cut into the woods at the edge of the field. It's a short walk through some willow trees, raspberry thicket, and poplars. With the equipment we carry, we aren't comfortable until we reach water. Strickland stays in the middle of the river, not bad for a guy nearly seventy. He wears a tan jacket and a porkpie hat with a plaid band. When the jacket is open, you can see he has a reindeer sweater on and a white shirt buttoned at the top. He likes to fish the tip of a narrow island where the water deepens and divides; salmon gather there before making more runs upstream.

I look forward to seeing Strickland; for me he's become part of the river. Weaver hasn't anything against him, but he figures Strickland monopolizes the water around the island. If I tell Weaver he should get here earlier, he says, "I've already tried that." He thinks Strickland stays all night, and maybe sleeps in the van. He also thinks I've chosen Strickland, who is four or five years older than we are, as some kind of buffer between us and the start of winter. He squints at me through the Polaroids and says, "As long as the music professor's out there beating the water, you figure the fishing will last forever, don't you?"

Downriver, Strickland raises his rod sharply. He has a fish on. I can hear the clicking of his reel as he plays out line. I glance at Weaver, but his head is turned. The fish jumps—I catch a sudden glimpse of silver—then Strickland shakes it loose.

"Too small," he tells me later, after I've worked my way down to him. He is tying a black and orange fly to his leader.

"Not *that* small," I say.

I'm fishing near shore. Sea gulls move high above the bare trees; the late afternoon sun catches their whiteness. From where we stand the river flows under a rusting footbridge, then past a trailer park built on lowlands. Every spring the water

floods that way. Below the park, the town's ugliness increases: the riverbank rises into a field of broken cars and orange machinery—backhoes, derricks, bulldozers—which have been long out of repair. Near the machinery is a gas station now stuccoed over and converted into a Mexican restaurant. We never fish that far downriver. In fact we seldom go beyond the footbridge.

"Have you had any luck?" I ask Strickland.

He shakes a blue dragonfly away from his line. Strands of damp white hair spike out from under his hat. "A decent steelhead," he says, and then touches his canvas bag.

I cast in his direction. "They're here."

He nods and says, "No doubt of it."

I may have asked him once about his family, or I may have dreamt that I asked. In any case, he said they were scattered around the country. It could have been me saying the same thing to him. If he had reached into his pocket to show me pictures, I think I would have said no. Bundled in heavy clothing as we are and balancing in the current, we can't open our wallets to show pictures, even if we wanted to. And besides, we aren't out here to relive our lives.

A small salmon I hook into jumps so close to the shore that my line catches in some overhanging alders. For a moment the fish is out of water, suspended from a branch. Then it shakes loose. Untangling the line from the bushes takes me a few minutes. My legs are cramping a little, and since I'm close to shore anyway I decide to sit on the bank. I place the fishing rod on the ground, undo the oak wading stick, canvas bag, and aluminum net from my aching shoulders. Ferns, still a vivid green, lie flat against the ground. The smell of damp sand takes me to a beach I visited near St. Kitts—years ago when my ex-wife and I were partway through a divorce. I went to the island by myself. On the last day of the trip I remember crossing through a sugar cane field to climb a small mountain. At the top I stood near a pile of soup cans with bullet holes in them and watched clouds misting with rain being whipped in across the Caribbean from Nevis. Then I began wishing that my wife had followed me. I looked toward the path I'd taken up the mountain, and for a while I actually expected her to arrive. Later, in Basseterre, I heard a public telephone ring as I was

leaving for the airport, and for the briefest of moments thought it might be her calling. But she had no idea where I was. I might just as well have left a note in a soup can on top of the mountain, hoping she'd read it some day.

At the end of the week I take my first plunge. My foot slips just as I'm ready to net a salmon, and I fall into the shallows near a whitewall tire. Only an arm gets wet, but I'm cold up to my shoulder and the crystal on my wristwatch is cracked and foggy.

Weaver, who is cross-river, shakes his head at me; a root beer barrel swells his cheek. Later Strickland comes by and says he has an extra shirt in his van.

"No thanks," I tell him. "I got chills: I'm taking the rest of the day off."

But he has already started for the van. When he returns, he holds out a red and grey woolen shirt.

"I don't think so," I say.

He looks startled. His dark eyes search my face. "But you must," he says.

I laugh, thinking he has made a joke. "Yeah," I say, and then I find myself putting on Strickland's itchy woolen shirt. When he goes, I am standing in the middle of the river. Yellow poplar leaves float past me. I'm wearing Strickland's itchy shirt, and I'm casting for salmon.

We learn about the river as we go along. We discover the glides likely to include salmon. By tapping the wading stick ahead of us, we avoid sudden drop-offs that will send us home, wet and disappointed, before we're ready to leave. We try to be patient. When you poke a submerged boulder with your foot, it might start out feeling small. But then when you try to step over, you could be straddling something the size of a shopping cart. We warn each other about these; we try to keep track. Strickland tells me about a submerged limestone ledge that's tilted just enough to cause trouble: if you make the mistake of stepping onto it too suddenly, you will begin a slow and immediate slide.

Strickland shoots line out. He is using a yellow and white streamer with a darker fly above it. "Even if your boots are skidproofed," he says, "you can't take anything for granted."

We are casting down by the footbridge, Strickland, Weaver, and I. Five or six other fishermen are within sight. It is the first day of November, and through my earmuffs I can hear Weaver complaining about the cold. The smell of fried food, hamburgers or something, floats down to us from the college cafeteria. Strickland fishes off to the side, near one of the concrete bridge abutments.

"For Chrissake," Weaver says. He holds an unwrapped Hershey bar above his head.

"Winter's almost here," I tell him. "You predicted it."

"I'm talking about that hook," he says. "Just above me."

After a few seconds I see it: a large, mean piece of steel, poised above Weaver's head and attached to a strand of nearly invisible monofilament that comes down from the powerline. Someone on the footbridge tried for an easy fish and got hung up.

Strickland turns around and says, "That's been there."

"I never saw it," I say.

Weaver removes the paper from his candy bar and takes a big bite of chocolate. I tilt my head and watch the hook sway above us.

"Easy does it," Strickland says. He clamps his lips together and draws a finger across his mouth.

Weaver laughs, and then I realize that my mouth is wide open, which is automatic, I suppose, whenever you look up at the sky.

A few days later, Weaver tells me that Strickland is going into the hospital for some kind of tests.

"What kind?" I ask.

He shrugs. "Heart, I guess."

"Did he tell you that?"

"Are you kidding?" he says. He tells me he knows somebody at the hospital who's heard about Strickland. Then I remember that Weaver's wife works there as a volunteer.

That afternoon, fishing opposite Strickland, I decide to ask about the tests. I call over but he doesn't answer. His line trails out a few feet in front of him, and I can see the untrimmed knots climbing up his tapered leader. His eyes are closed. When I push against the current toward him, I can see his head

moving to the sound of the river. He is humming a tune. I'm listening. Is it Bach? Beethoven? Then he hears the water rushing around my legs and looks up.

"What's wrong?" he asks.

"Nothing. I'm fine," I tell him.

I reach into my canvas bag to show him a salmon that must be close to five pounds, but requiring no proof, he waves me off. "They're in here," he says. "There's no doubt."

Maybe it's the hook we pass under now and then, or maybe Strickland's quiet patience gets to Weaver after a while; but over the next few days Weaver tells us how they foul-hook salmon in the western part of the state near Lake Ontario: how they use treble hooks weighted with several ounces of lead around the shank. In a sort of frenzy, people line both sides of the river, casting these hooks and jerking them along the river bottom in hopes of snagging a salmon in the side, on the back, through the tail, anywhere they can. They cast, they reel line, they jerk the rod as hard as they can; then they reel and jerk, reel and jerk, until the hook dangles in front of them. Then they throw out again. Sometimes a weighted hook breaks loose during a cast and slaps water on the other side like a .22 bullet.

"People have gotten hurt," Weaver says.

"I can imagine," I tell him.

He recalls a woman with a pistol tucked in her belt, who would snag a fish and then try to shoot it on the way in. He saw an old man hook a fish, then get pulled from a granite ledge into the water thirty feet below.

"Those frigging cohoes," Weaver says, "average twenty or thirty pounds, you know."

"It's not for me," I say.

When Weaver produces a weighted treble hook to show us what they use, Strickland smiles and shakes his head. "It hardly seems fair," he says.

The river pulls someone in this morning, a fisherman I've said hello to now and then. I recognize the green John Deere hat tilted high on his head before I see his surprised face and the cigarette falling from his lips. He has strayed into deep current just above where Weaver and I are fishing; he realizes

his mistake and tries to get back to safer water. But the river already has him. It lifts his feet and turns him around. His wading staff can't help him anymore. All we can do is watch him dance past us as he tries to regain balance. Strickland watches from a distance, arm suspended in the air as he backcasts. The fisherman's tanned face is apologetic, resigned; he knows he's going under and is sorry to ruin our fishing. It's okay even though we say nothing: it could be any one of us. Twenty or thirty feet from us, he splashes under, then crawls out below the footbridge where the river turns shallow again.

For a few days early in December, the weather can't decide how it wants to go. A mild day follows two cold days. Snow is always in the air now. Weaver has missed yesterday and threatens to stop coming altogether. Strickland is still going strong. I come out, though I'm feeling sick and dizzy with the flu. I follow along near Strickland. The salmon are moving, but not as much as before. Sometimes one still leaps like a bright promise above the water. We dress warmer, grow fat with extra clothing—scarves, shirts, pants, coats—anything to keep the cold away from our bones. When the wind kicks up, we reach behind our shoulders and slip hoods over the hats and earmuffs we already have on. We hold our gloves in our teeth when we change flies. When the weather improves, we peel off the extra clothing and return to feeling normal.

The number of people fishing dwindles. There are seldom more than four or five of us on weekdays; work keeps the younger ones away, but they come on Saturdays and Sundays. On a relatively mild weekend I count eleven of us. For a few hours the sun turns strong and warms our backs and faces. People unwrap sandwiches: you can smell the bread. And for a while some children in shiny ski suits stand on the footbridge and call to us.

But the next weekend, when the snow sifts down and stays on our hats and shoulders, a young fisherman walks by me on the way to his car and says, "That's it. No more until spring." Others, too, have that look of not returning: we can see it in their faces. The few who stay are the old ones.

This morning a cold wind shakes our hoods and tries to peel the skin from our faces. We can't stop shaking. Tricked by an

inaccurate weather report, Weaver huddles on the riverbank, hands to his face, back arched against the wind. I stand in shallow water, wondering why I am here. I can't see the rocks and gravel I'm standing on; over the weeks, leaves have drifted in and sunk to the bottom. On my way from the car past the broken milkweed and the decayed mushrooms, the ground was damp and slippery. Everything smelled of dampness and mold.

"Let's get out of here!" Weaver says.

"Wait a minute," I say. I've seen Strickland's van parked near the footbridge, and now my eyes are focusing on Strickland himself. "What are we doing?" I yell over to him.

"What?" he calls back through the wind.

"Screw him," Weaver says. "Let's move!"

I cup my hands to my face and holler to Strickland. "Is it worth being out here? Isn't it time to go?"

He lets his wading stick go slack; tethered to a cord around his neck it slaps the water in front of him. His eyes are nearly shut against the wind. His nose is dripping. He pulls a Kleenex from inside his khaki coat, then shakes off a coughdrop that's stuck to it. He wipes his nose and says, "I don't know."

Weaver starts to walk back to the car, then stops and says: "The salmon are all gone. That's it. The season's over."

Strickland shakes his head. "The salmon are still here," he says.

"The son-of-a-bitch is lying," Weaver says. "Look at his eyes; nobody's home in there."

I'm shaking so hard that I can feel gravel shifting under my feet. Strickland has moved closer to me. He touches my arm. "They have to be here," he says. "They have no choice."

The wind gusts, cuts through my clothing. Weaver has already gone. "That's it," I say. "I'm getting the hell out."

Weaver calls before Christmas, tells me that Strickland is undergoing tests at the medical center in Vermont. Weaver refuses to go back to the river until spring. "I have no argument with that," I tell him. He and his wife are thinking about a cruise to somewhere warm. "Maybe an island," he says.

At night I have trouble sleeping; I think about Strickland in a hospital across the lake, with catheters moving up his arteries toward his heart. I spend too much time arguing with myself

about how worthwhile my life has been. When I fall asleep, dreams nudge me awake. In a fishing dream I'm reeling in new cars, television sets, appliances, furniture: all things I haven't wanted in years. Later I find myself in waders walking up a steep hill. At the top is a bunch of old cars scattered around, and I'm wondering where the owners are. When I get closer I can see someone laid out in each car—arms extended through the side windows, legs through the windshield, and feet nailed to the top of the hood where the hood ornament should be. Then I realize I've stumbled upon some kind of crucifixion, and try to avoid getting too close. It seems like a solemn moment. I'm determined to be quiet. But the ground is muddy and unsteady, and tugs at my feet. And so when I try to walk away my boots make little squeaking sounds.

On Christmas Day, a week or so later, I'm surprised by mild weather, an unexpected gift that takes me to the attic for my fishing equipment, then to the river by noon. The wind has shifted and comes in from the south. I see three fishermen upstream, but no one I recognize. I hook into a salmon on my third cast, another unexpected gift. I'm surprised that the fish doesn't break water instantly. Instead, it stays deep and turns over and over against the river bottom until my line breaks. Late in the afternoon the darkness takes a long time coming down, and I can feel the lake breathing a warm, soft wind into my face. I try to recall how cold it had been a while ago: how the wind tore the feeling from our hands and yanked bright, tinselly flies from Weaver's tackle box. But the sweet weather won't let me remember very long, and I fish until after dark.

On this warm evening, sea gulls knit the air above the river. Their patterns provide comfort. I feel as if I have arrived somewhere, and I don't want to leave. Winter has decided to leave instead. Then I hear a car door slam. Someone's high-beams light up the river, and I figure it's time I thought about leaving. And then I see Strickland moving through the light, a figure in a silent movie. He enters the water by the footbridge. He carries a flashlight, and he walks slowly over a layer of ice, testing each step before coming down with his full weight.

When the worst day arrives—shortly after Christmas—I am not ready for it. Wind and snow swirl around me wherever I go.

Winter, the way I imagined it as a child, has come back for good: as an old man with wild eyes and puffed-out cheeks. I can stand it for a half-hour or so at a time, and then I retreat to the car and turn the heater on high. This way I'm good for part of the day. Whenever I return to the car, I pound my fists against my legs to drive away numbness. I glance back at bootprints showing where I've stepped from the river and crossed the snow-covered ice, as if I don't believe where I've been. I sit in the car, wondering if I should try to extend the season into the new year. Then I feel like laughing, because the wild face I see in the car mirror doesn't look like the face that's doing the wondering.

Winter clouds the river. I take a small roll of toilet paper from my pocket and peel off a length. I wipe my nose and feel ice. Strickland is out here, a patient statue, and maybe one or two others. With the snow coming down, it's difficult to say. Now Strickland is close by. Ice coils around his cherry-wood net; the guides of his fishing rod ice over. The wind picks up and throws our lines back into our faces. One of us—is it me?—yells. No, it's Strickland: he is waving his hands and shouting at the bad weather. I yell, too; I shake my fists. Then two, maybe three, more voices join us—from people we can't see. All of us are yelling as loud as we can. Strickland waves his hands above his head as if trying to make sense, or music, out of all this noise.

Then it's quiet again, except for the cold wind and the chugging sound of water hitting ice. Strickland's hands are at his side.

"There's nothing below the surface," I tell him. "Nothing left to cast for."

Strickland's dark eyes settle on my face. We stand in the river, waiting. Then something, or the shadow of something, leaps out of the swirling water, hangs in the air for a heartbeat, and disappears. Strickland sees it, too.

"That wasn't a fish," I tell him.

"What was it?" he says.

What can I say? Something we both imagined?

I look down and see a fishing rod—there, trembling in my hand. I cast; Strickland casts. Our lines search the cold air for whatever has disappeared.

GEORGE WATSON

The Singular Friendship: Yeats and Pound at Stone Cottage

Thirty years on, half-crazed and caged by his compatriots in a prison-compound near Pisa, Ezra Pound was to recall an English winter he had once spent with W.B. Yeats in 1913-14 by a waste moor in Sussex. It was at Stone Cottage in Coleman's Hatch, near East Grinstead; and "Uncle William" had been no easy companion, refusing to eat hot ham for his dinner because peasants do, and intoning his poetic triumphs in a voice like the winter wind. In *Pisan Cantos* (1948) Pound mocked the old man's brogue in affectionate recollection:

I recalled the noise in the chimney
as it were the wind in the chimney
but was in reality Uncle William
downstairs composing
that he had made a great Peeeeeacock
in the proide ov his oiye
had made a great peeeeeeecock in the . . .
made a great peacock
in the proide of his oyyee

Canto LXXXIII

adding generously "as indeed he had"—Yeats's finest poems being "perdurable" and more lasting than bronze.

That winter in Sussex, though seldom much discussed or interpreted, is one of the odder incidents in poetic history. When the forty-eight-year-old Yeats invited Pound, a younger man by twenty years, to be his secretary in the country for three months, he had been stirred by their evening talks in Bloomsbury where Yeats lived—talks where Pound's brash confidence and American charm had made him sound more like a master than a disciple. It was a meeting of opposites, but

opposites with much in common. Both men were provincials—vividly, defiantly conscious of it—in the cosmopolitan world of London. In the loosest of loose senses they were even relatives, Pound being about to marry Dorothy Shakespear, daughter of Yeats's mistress Olivia; and the Pounds, when they married in 1914, were to spend more winters with Yeats in Sussex during the first World War. In a *Paris Review* interview Donald Hall reports that Pound recalled reading Doughty's *Dawn in Britain* aloud to Yeats, and wrangling, since "the Irish like contradiction," though Pound failed to teach him fencing. Both were credulous of bold political nostrums and the lure of the righteous dictator, though here their most dangerous thoughts were still to come. Both, it is easy to forget, were nineties romantics, infatuated with what Pound in his first book called the Spirit of Romance—though for Yeats that spirit was Celtic and occult, for Pound Mediterranean. And both were conscious that time was short for romance, its spirit running out in the civilization of Europe. Lovers of past ages, they were compulsorily innovative and forced to create a spirit of the new.

But there was still twenty years between them, and a whole wide Atlantic stretching from Philadelphia to Sligo. Their congeniality was a freak: they fascinated each other as exotic specimens. "This queer creature," Yeats called Pound in a letter to Lady Gregory (10 December 1909)—queer enough to be interested in the poetry of medieval troubadours, which must indeed have looked strange in a twenty-four-year-old American in Edwardian London. Pound hated the country, in any case, and wrote to his mother (November 1913) that he fully expected to be bored with Yeats's talk about psychical research. But he could still help. He was a careless, exuberant linguist—Yeats none at all, never even learning to speak French; and Gilbert Murray used to tell how, when years later he asked Yeats whether he knew anything of the Irish language he spoke so highly of, Yeats had shamefacedly replied, after a pause: "It is the great grief of my life that I have never been able to learn a word of it."

Above everything, both poets were convinced that a passionate romanticism was inadequate to the new century and dangerous to their own reputation in the world. Yeats, above all, had some vital cause for concern. He had been publishing volumes of verse since 1889; but though nearly fifty, he was not

yet married or settled in life, and anxiously aware that two monarchs had died, two generations come and gone, since he had launched himself as a poet in Tennyson's lifetime. "Now I'm the king of the cats," he had remarked gleefully in Dublin in 1909, on hearing of the death of Swinburne. He cannot have felt king of the cats by 1913: more like an aging, anxious player who knows that he needs a better act.

Pound's sense of the matter, at twenty-eight, concerned his own importance. He had settled in England five years before, and was busy conquering literary London, or as much of it as he thought domitable. "I regard the visit as a duty to posterity," he told his mother, setting aside all thought of rural boredom. In the event, he rather enjoyed it. "Yeats is much finer *intime*," he wrote soon after to William Carlos Williams (19 December 1913) from Stone Cottage, "than seen spasmodically in the midst of a whirl," meaning in Bloomsbury. Their friendship prospered. It was to be revived years later at Rapallo in 1928, when Yeats was to join Pound, for a time, in his Italian exile. And Yeats, not always eager to acknowledge help, believed that Pound had been a seminal influence on his poetry after 1914, and even complimented him in *A Vision* (1925) as a "fore-runner," like Nietzsche, to his own thoughts.

What did Pound start, or forerun, in Yeats's poetic mind?

In a letter to Lady Gregory he echoed Pound's famous Imagiste programme, "A few don'ts for an Imagiste," which had just appeared in *Poetry* (Chicago) in 1913: no superfluties or clichés, no ornaments but good ones, few abstractions or none. Pound's prescription of gaunt, hard outlines was well understood by Yeats—at least as a program. Pound, he wrote,

helps me to get back to the definite and concrete, away from modern abstractions. To talk over a poem with him is like getting you to put a sentence into dialect. All becomes clear and natural.

Pound also introduced him to Japanese Noh plays, which are ceremonially gaunt and hard; and in 1916 he was to persuade Yeats to write an introduction to *Certain Noble Plays of Japan*. It was an influence of style. The Modernist revolution, or attempted revolution, by the "Men of 1914" (as Wyndham Lewis called them) was always more than a matter of poetic diction.

But diction lay at the heart of it; and the hard, gaunt tone that Pound clamored for and Yeats tried to emulate—a clear, natural dialect that eschews abstractions—led straight into some hard, gaunt dogmas about finance and power. Both men despised romanticism, though not romance. Both hated the cant, as they saw it, of free parliamentary states, and despised the decaying rhetoric of Victorian liberty. Whatever constitutions may say or utopians may think, the world is made by power. Finance is one form that power takes; and behind the façade of democracy, as both Pound and Yeats came to believe, it was finance—even Jewish finance—that pulls the strings.

Merchant and scholar who have left me blood
That has not passed through any huckster's loin,

as Yeats put it in the introductory poem to *Responsibilities* he wrote at Stone Cottage—it is dated January 1914—boasting the purity of his lineage. Empty abstractions like Liberty, Equality and Fraternity are part of the mush of modern decadence, for such men. As T.E. Hulme remarks in *Speculations* (1924), romanticism is mere “spilt religion,” with no more respect for decorum or form than treacle poured over a dinner table.

If 1913 was the hinge of Yeats's life as a poet, it was Pound that made it so. And yet in the twenty years and more left to Yeats as a writer—he died in January 1939—he never, in point of diction, seems unambiguously a Modernist figure. It is not easy to say why. The thumbmark of Modernist diction, as Pound and Eliot understood it, is something easily recognizable but difficult to describe. It is highly parasitic on the late romantic diction it derided as decadent and strove earnestly to supersede. In *Kenneth Allott and the Thirties* (1980), Donald Davie has pinned it to the relations between nouns and their attendant adjectives, where you “press your luck,” when one of them points one way and one another, by widening the gap, adding that this is no charlatanism but “a serious experiment seriously pursued.” I suspect it is more a matter of the intrusion of the unpoetical, as Victorians understood it, into the poetical. The chief Modernist intrusion is in terms of words—commonly polysyllabic and of learned origin—into contexts where they are the last thing you would expect. Nouns and adjectives are

only part of the story. The noisy fanfare to all that is Eliot's famous opening to *Prufrock* (1917):

Let us go, then, you and I,
When the evening is spread out against the sky
Like a patient etherised upon a table . . .

That is little more than a knockdown effect of a young man in a hurry. Far subtler, and far more predictive of how English poetry was to move in this century, are the delicate stylistic surprises of the later Eliot. "Etherised" is a surprise, but a far from subtle one: it grabs the romanticism of sunsets and gives it the boot. *Ash-Wednesday* (1930) opens with an infinitely refined version of a similar stylistic effect:

. . . . why should I mourn
The vanished power of the usual reign?

where "usual" strikes a thin, clinical chill into what might otherwise look like a passionate elegy on the loss of youth. That "usual" is a word unusual in poetry is a fairly recent fact: strictly speaking, it is only surprising here because the nineteenth century would have found it so, and on a longer view it is nothing of the kind. Shakespeare often employs it, and untrivially:

. . . such wanton, wild and usual slips
As are companions noted and most known
To youth and liberty,

says Polonius, solemnly enough, in *Hamlet*. No wonder Eliot, in his critical essays, tried to revive the language and spirit of the Elizabethans.

Yeats sometimes approaches that kind of stylistic surprise, harsh and chilling, as if romanticism needed a cooling agent to be tolerable to severe modern taste. But he does not characteristically indulge it far, even after 1913. He dallies with it. When Pound reviewed his *Responsibilities* at its first appearance in 1914, he plainly saw that the Modernist revolution was not fully there. "Is Mr Yeats an Imagiste?" he asks, and replies:

No, Mr Yeats is a symbolist, but he has written *des Images* as have many good poets before him,

praising "the new note" in some of his poems, as if Yeats were a brand to be plucked from the romantic burning. Lately, he approvingly remarks, Yeats has become "gaunter, seeking greater hardness of outline," though this is "not demonstrable by any particular passage."¹ That is suitably cautious: but if a particular passage does not demonstrate it, what does? In fact the old Yeats of the 1920s does draw upon occasional Modernist effects of style. But he seldom, if ever, writes an entire Modernist poem; he does not succeed when he attempts it; and some of his modernizing effects are so glancing that one could be forgiven for missing them altogether. The celebrated last line of "Among School Children," for example, from *The Tower* (1928), is so faintly wrenched out of true that one might wonder whether it is wrenched at all:

... O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,
How can we know the dancer from the dance?

That interrogative ending is one of Yeats's prouder devices—"And what rough beast . . . ?" It is never notably used, I believe, by Eliot or Pound; and it gives some of Yeats's shortest poems a sense of horizon which may be simulated but is still invigorating, as if more were being offered than is there.

Did she put on his knowledge with his power
Before the indifferent beak could let her drop?

as he ends "Leda and the Swan"; and one is meant to imagine (it is the supreme test of good Yeatsians to imagine it) that the poet could indeed answer his own question—that he sees further than his own poem, as sages see further than their profoundest utterances, and of course far further than the reader. That tactic is fundamental to Yeats's standing as a sage, which was subject to some mockery in his own lifetime: there is a devastating account of a visit to Yeats in Oxford in 1921, for

¹ *Poetry* (Chicago) 4 (1914); reprinted in his *Literary Essays* (London, 1954), pp. 378-79.

example, by the young C.S. Lewis, to be found in his published letters: “. . . into the presence chamber, lit by tall candles, with orange-coloured curtains . . . Then the talk began, . . . all about magic and cabbalism and ‘the Hermetic knowledge’” (14 March 1921). As a Belfast man, Lewis is unashamedly a prejudiced witness in anything that concerns Celtic twilight or mumbo-jumbo, though he generously allowed that Yeats’s “eloquence and presence” were great—adding in an ensuing letter that, on his next visit, Yeats was “almost quite sane,” even if he always got round to magic in the end.

Yeats’s stylistic triumphs often depend on an acceptance, readily given, that a native speaker cannot make a mistake with language. When he writes “How can we know the dancer from the dance?” we sense that something faintly exceptional is happening without remotely suspecting an error. If he had written “How can we tell . . .,” nothing exceptional would have happened, and the line could as easily have been written a hundred years earlier. That wrenching and bracing may be presumed an effect of Modernism. But even the greatest poems of his sixties—“Sailing to Byzantium” (1927) and “Byzantium” (1930), for example—are still not radically Modernist poems. They have been no more than mildly sunburnt by Modernism, so to speak—a touch of the sun. They are still Yeats.

Why is this? One mark of Modernism that Yeats never adopted is the short, stabbing phrase that does business for the long syntactical pattern. It is in the tensile power of his extended syntax that, early and late, Yeats proved himself as a poet. Pound, by contrast, can write like a literary *pointilliste*:

For three years, out of key with his time,
He strove to resuscitate the dead art
Of poetry; to maintain ‘the sublime’
In the old sense. Wrong from the start—

as *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* (1920) begins, in its casually fragmented way. Yeats never scatters detail like that, unyoked by syntax. To take “Leda and the Swan” again: metrically speaking, the poem is nothing more adventurous than a Shakespearian sonnet, and even the enjambement is modest and unexceptional; while the subject, which concerns the fall of Troy, is familiarly classical. The syntax is something else: the first three

words—"A sudden blow"—ripped out of context; the reader floored, like Leda herself, and (like her) left staggering; then a mounting tension fully in the romantic tradition, if more succinct than most nineteenth-century poets would have attempted. The poem, tiny as it is, is so fiercely realized that it has even excited feminist indignation, though Yeats's note suggests it began, at least, as a political poem calling for "some violent annunciation" to usher in a new, post-individualistic age, the tradition of Hobbes and the French Revolution being (as he supposed) exhausted. At all events, Pound never wrote like this, in high syntactical tension, and it is hard to see any Pound in the sonnet, unless in its magisterial terseness. It is pure Yeats.

Why, then, did that winter at Stone Cottage matter to English poetry?

It mattered, I suspect, by virtue of what Yeats and Pound already had in common. This was a friendship of disparate personalities and like minds. Though a generation apart, Uncle William and young Ezra already shared some crucial similarities of temperament and belief: similarities best presented in numbered order.

First, both inclined towards what W.H. Auden, in his late, safe Anglican period used to deride as "heathen mumbo-jumbo." Soon after Yeats's family settled in England in 1887, he joined or formed the Order of the Golden Dawn, a mishmash of medieval Judaic mysticism and late Victorian spiritualism, and it held his loyalties at least till 1902. Pound's dogmatisms, down to his imprisonment at the liberation of Italy, were a succession of Latin myths that stretched from pre-paganism and classical paganism down to that last of the Roman deities, Benito Mussolini, for whom he broadcast. It would be a large understatement to call such dogmas alien to the England of the years 1890 and 1920, when Pound left London. They are simply *wild*—some would say mad. They qualify both poets for the proud title of cranks. "How on earth," Auden once mused on Yeats's passion for the occult,

How on earth . . . *could* a man of Yeats's gifts take such nonsense seriously? . . . How could Yeats, with his great aesthetic appreciation of aristocracy, ancestral houses, ceremonious tradition, take up something so essentially lower-middle-class—or should I say South-

ern Californian? . . . Mediums, spells, the Mysterious Orient—*how* embarrassing.²

A more recent account, Graham Hough's *Mystery Religion of W. B. Yeats* (1984), rejects this as crass, on the loyal ground that it is impossible to make great poems out of mere rubbish. But Auden is surely right, and the case illustrates the logician's point that nothing can be called impossible after it has happened. To Europeans, all swans were naturally and necessarily white till the first explorer reached Australia and saw a black one. Yeats is not the first black swan, in any case: great poets have used rubbish before he did, and believed it. The theology of Lucretius is not now, to my knowledge, accepted by anyone. Pound's dogmas, which eventually involved Italian Fascism and anti-Semitism, are by now even more embarrassing than Yeats's, and easily worse than what Auden called Southern Californian. Literature excites an ever-wider tolerance of art but not, if wisely used, an ever-wider tolerance of error. Yeats and Pound were truly in error, on a monumental scale; and Pound, at least, lived long enough to be embarrassed by it himself. In 1967, in abject old age, he called anti-Semitism his worst mistake of all, "that stupid, suburban prejudice."³

Second, both poets believed in an *avant-garde*. That notion has died so recently in English-speaking countries and (more surprisingly) in France that only the very young can need to have the matter explained to them—and not even they, if they listen and read. In Yeats's London, from the nineties onwards, the notion was highly recent and French: in the London that Pound inhabited between 1908 and 1920, it had all the excitement of a new faith. For the first and (perhaps) last time, London in that age was aflame with manifestoes. Julian Symons has recently described the phenomenon in *The Makers of the New* (1987) in carefully restrained irony, as a survivor who has lived to see and savor the Age of Nostalgia that awoke to life in the 1970s. That new mood has left Modernism looking dilapidated and sad, so that it takes an effort of will to re-enter the literary

² W.H. Auden, "Yeats as an example," *Kenyon Review* 10 (1948); reprinted in *The Permanence of Yeats*, ed. by James Hall and Martin Steinmann (New York, 1950), p. 345.

³ "A conversation between Ezra Pound and Allen Ginsburg," *Evergreen Review* (June 1968).

consciousness of Late Victorian and Edwardian chic. The candlelit room in Oxford that C.S. Lewis derided in 1921 sounds much like the trappings of a French coterie *maître*; so, in photos, do Pound's broadbrimmed hat and flowing mantle, and I remember Allen Tate remarking that Ezra, a happily married man, was not naturally the kind to take a mistress—he merely thought a poet should be seen to have one, as well as a bohemian hat. George Moore once remarked that Yeats in his flowing tie and long black cloak looked to him like “an Irish parody of the poetry I had seen all my life strutting its rhythmic way in the alleys of the Luxembourg Gardens,” and it is clear that both Yeats and Pound set themselves up as *maîtres* in their public postures as well as in their verse. That is quite distinct from T.S. Eliot, who affected that air in his early poems, indeed, as a sort of American Laforgue, but never in his dress, manners or morals. To the coterie-mind, literature is a group impelled by a cause. One makes a life, Pound remarked in 1914, out of about twenty people drawn from the two hundred most interesting people a nation has to offer: “the score of this two hundred with whom one happens to have made friends.”⁴

Third, both poets tried to see things—material objects—as the stuff of poetry. “Your interest is in mundane things,” Yeats's father once perceptively told him, “whether beyond the stars or not.” The thinginess of their poems, their *chosisme*, was designedly startling to their first readers, even unnerving, like Eliot's mention of a gashouse in *The Waste Land*. In Yeats's “Sailing to Byzantium,” the bird that entertains the emperor is a mechanical contraption, not a bird out of nature:

. . . such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make
Of hammered gold and gold enamelling
To keep a drowsy Emperor awake.

That drugged, incantatory power of style is alien to Pound. But its thinginess is not, nor its artifice—even eternity was an artifice to Yeats—and Pound's *Cantos* were a laborious attempt to make an epic out of things and things and ever more things. When in

⁴ Ezra Pound, *Literary Essays* (London, 1954), p. 372.

his last years Yeats wrote "The Circus Animals' Desertion," he was pounding the same drum:

Those masterful images because complete
 Grew in pure mind, but out of what began?
 A mound of refuse or the sweepings of a street,
 Old kettles, old bottles, and a broken can,
 Old iron, old bones, old rags, that raving slut
 Who keeps the till . . .

High specificity in that fashion is a strenuous bid to keep up the Imagiste programme of eschewing abstraction. But even in poems written early at Stone Cottage, one can see the same force at work. When Yeats wrote "The Cold Heaven" for *Responsibilities*, he triumphantly married a passion for things with the romantic lyric:

Suddenly I saw the cold and rook-delighting heaven
 That seemed as though ice burned and was but the more ice.

One might allow "rook-delighting" as a compound epithet in the romantic tradition, like Keats's "branch-charmèd." But Yeats dares introduce the ugliest of common birds into a love poem, and the Imagiste mark is even plainer when he insists that ice is so icy that it scorches. No wonder Pound, reviewing the book, remarked that though Yeats was a symbolist, not an Imagist, he had used *des images* "as many good poets before him"—rightly implying that Modernism is less an innovation than an intensification of an existing style. Browning, after all, whom Pound admired, is given to heaps of broken images, as in "Childe Roland to the dark tower came": so much so that his heaps can look formless and outmatched by their component parts. That makes the Georgian prejudice against things all the harder to understand. I can remember an old lady remarking that poems simply have no business to be about gasworks—much as if Browning had never written.

And lastly, a profound hatred of intellect is likely to have animated debates at Stone Cottage in the winter of 1913-14 and after. The dogmatic road the two poets trod, it is now clear, was stained with blood and ultimately discreditable to both. "The

Ghost of Roger Casement," it is all too probable, gloats in the late 1930s over the rise of the Luftwaffe in an age when the catchword "The bomber always gets through" was widely believed, and about to prove all too true:

The ghost of Roger Casement
Is beating on the door.

Yeats was lucky to die as early as January 1939—the very month, as it happened, that Auden emigrated to America. In March Auden wrote his elegy "In memory of W.B. Yeats," containing the unforgettable line

You were silly like us: your gift survived it all,

which may be taken as an ingenious compound of reproach and self-reproach. If Christopher Isherwood's account of their sea journey to New York together is to be believed, Auden chose that moment to announce that he was giving up left-wing activity. He had resembled Yeats, as he saw, in supposing his poetic gifts had given him a charter to dogmatize, his scepticism a safe and sure defense against credulity. But it is the classic fate of the radical sceptic to fall for dogmas wilder by a mile than the conventional dogmas they have spurned, and no decade before our own times illustrates the easy gullibility of the professed sceptic more tragically than the thirties. A few months after the Yeats elegy, in "September 1, 1939," Auden reproached himself again at the outbreak of a war where Fascism and Communism stood armed together in an alliance "sealed in blood," as Stalin cheerfully put it:

... As the clever hopes expire
Of a low dishonest decade.

That is usually read as a jibe against the appeasers, and it surely includes them. But there were other clever hopes besides theirs: Yeats's Order of the Golden Dawn, Pound's ideas about Fascism and Funny Money, and Auden's about Marxism and Homer Lane. These are the fantasies of clever people, fearfully conscious of their cleverness, who yet live to realize that in the event they have not been as clever, or as wise, as ordinary men.

There is an open and avowed contempt for rationality in Yeats and Pound alike. Wordsworth, as Yeats once wrote to his father, was “always destroying his poetic experience . . . by his reflective power” (18 January 1915). That suggests a fear of rational reflection, an intellectual pride founded on a love of innovation: *new dogmas, new theories, new ceremonies*.

Eliot distanced himself from all that by commonplacely joining the Church of England, which was an astounding move. But even earlier than 1927, when he publicly declared for King and Canterbury, he had insisted in his essay on William Blake (1920) that no man, not even a great poet, can plausibly invent a whole tradition:

Blake’s supernatural territories . . . illustrate the crankiness, the eccentricity, which frequently affects writers outside of the Latin traditions . . . What his genius required, and what it sadly lacked, was a framework of accepted and traditional ideas which would have prevented him from indulging in a philosophy of his own.

That could as easily have been said of some of Yeats and much of Pound. More than twenty years later, Eliot was to chide his old friend in the carefully coded language of *Little Gidding* (1942) as the “familiar compound ghost” now working for the enemy in time of war. If that ghost is Pound, as I believe, then Eliot’s sad, distinguished lines might prove an epitaph upon the spirit of Stone Cottage and its innovative spirit:

For last year’s words belong to last year’s language,
And next year’s words await another voice,

and the ghost of Pound chronicles the penalties of age: the expiry of sense, impotent rage against folly, and laughter that bespeaks no amusement. But worst of all,

. . . the rending pain of re-enactment
Of all that you have done, and been; the shame
Of motives late revealed, and the awareness
Of things ill done and done to others’ harm
Which once you took for exercise of virtue.

In such formal terms of regret, a poet in time of war said farewell to Modernism and its lost leader.

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PATRICIA GOEDICKE

The Goldberg Variations

The Eye

Music pure as the desert.
In the superimposed calm
Of separate but equal equations
Dry grains, immaculate, barely touch
Each other.

And the pianist sits at the keyboard,
Hovers over it with the distant
Thin vigilance of a helicopter.

Carefully the fingers press, lift
One low hill after another

Into violent upsurges, minute
Shimmering layers of hissing
Precise grit.

But mostly the land is flat.

The tribes having been gathered together
And then suppressed
For their own good, into subdivisions

Around every oasis
Authority's level headed
Logic has taken over:

In the bleak geometry of noon
All error has been stamped out.

And who controls the water?

As the sluice gates mechanically open,
Then close

The pianist walks the line.

Along the irrigation ditches
Joy occasionally blooms,
Puffs of sweet green

But the small headsprings of tenderness, the tears
That began everything have long since disappeared.

No snivelling among the pyramids
And no self pity, either:

The suicide note is discovered
If it ever is, fallen
through a crack in the floor.

How many crumpled bodies
For Pharaoh to sleep in peace? Reason
Plays itself out by number,
Covers its own tracks.

Hammered to parallel horizons
Over the stone paw of the Sphinx
Out there in the implacable
Empires of harmony

Beware the One, Single
Imperturbable Eye
That sweeps, unbroken
From sky to sky.

A Greenhouse

Yet in these blinding flatlands
Suddenly a new chord crashes.

Over the strict bars of the grid
First one quarter, then an eighth,

Then a run of sixteen verticals pokes up

Like pygmies down from the forest, prime
Small figures that itch
And jiggle in their sockets.

Among the twisted cataracts,
The untamed waterfalls of the mountains

There are no plains, only deep
Wet valleys, lush
Ankle and mind cloggers.

Among the crocodiles and the orchids
Each tribe keeps to itself

But hunched, burning, a dark
Curled into himself troglodyte

The pianist hears them, their humming
Gurgles in his throat.

The heavens being what we see
Only by glimpses, in the jungle
As moist secrets mutter
Thick leaved, in the night

Almost he begins to sing a little, to break out
In his rough voice, abrupt
Brief spears of it raised

And then lowered:

Rummaging through a rich
Greenhouse of scarlet trumpet flowers, tangled
Intricate nests of notes

Hunger breathes through his mouth
Like a sick oboe

But even as he bows down,
Crouches over the piano

Now there is no holding back.

Groaning over the keys
In full cry, out loud

He can't stop; muscling into each footprint
Like a bloodhound,
Intelligence purrs in his fingertips

Or else shouts:

For each new species,
Each planned permutation
He knows there is another

And moans into it, lapped
In subtle ecstasies of grief.

The Performing Animal

For what he is after lives
 Not just in the heavens, in pure shining veils
 Of clear counterpoint, the logarithms
 Of the spheres

But also buries itself, beating
 In someone's low chest gone to earth.

In every synagogue, in every nomad tent
 Thirsting for water in the barrios
 The cry rumbles like a drum:

The performing animal almost howls
 But will not let go the thread.

Fathers and fortresses, lay down your arms!

Whole civilizations have been flattened
 By laws that must not be left undisturbed.

Control is the one Word
 Over all

But the pianist bears up under it,
 Struggles to keep it human.

Good son, obedient
 As he is wily,
 With blunt, nimble fingers
 And recently opposed thumbs

Over the elegant mathematics bent
 In boundless pleasure, it's his own voice
 Helpless, keeps rising up,
 Will not be silenced ever.

In chords mounting like rain,
Great floods of it surge
Over the barricades like armies,
Oceans sweeping through the concert hall

Until everything in it is floating,
All dry lands inundated

With packing crates, old clothes, cooking pots,
Bibles, abandoned computers
Strewn everywhere, in the ragged
Triumphant minority of mess

The pianist breaks over our stunned heads
And then mops it all up,
Squeezing from his two hands

Once more the theme
That started it all:

Winding its slow way over the land

The last faint trickle of the sound
Of someone weeping, anyone: child
Or grown man.

ALICE FULTON

The Collected Carmen Lionhart

Carmen Lionhart wanted to gentle entropy.
A specialist in residential comfort,
he came to fix my air conditioner.
“Let us refresh you”
said his shirt. As I considered this
the cord streaked by and my Siesta
Energy Appliance fell
down the fire escape, breaking
in a window far below.
Carmen Lionhart followed
on the stairs, where he met the weeping
tenant and composed a lifetime
contract for service and repairs.

He tried to keep his kinship with chaos
strictly nonconsanguineal. Nonetheless,
a pen left on his dashboard
was sure to find a slot and sink, spreading
monsoons through the tubing, hodgepodge
in the heater. “Vinyl seats
were made for couples like us,”
Carmen Lionhart liked to say. He liked to say

“Before we met, my heart
felt like one sneaker in a dryer,”
but that wasn’t what he said
on our first date. On that occasion
he whispered “Every place has its air-
handling peculiarities,” and I leaped
at the bait, recognizing a man
who’d keep me warm in winter,
cool in summer and covered
with lovebites inbetween.

Carmen Lionhart had had previous relationships
 with melee, yet I expanded his pandemonium zone.
 After memorizing libraries on the soigné
 charm of bulbs thrown and planted
 where they land, I pitched
 fourteen hundred daffodils
 till Carmen Lionhart said "Stop,
 there's no place left to stand."
 I asked him how he came to be
 so wise. "I watch the news," he sighed.

Though Carmen Lionhart lived amid pastoral ferment,
 his mind, like all deep installations,
 kept its even temperature
 year round. Sometimes drought crazed the land
 a scabrous tan, set the crown vetch
 roaring like a formula
 one race under predictable
 Lippizzaner clouds. Or it rained for weeks
 before the sun got in a lucky punch.

Yet whatever Carmen Lionhart touched turned out plumb.
 He had no truck with la-di-da or bubblegum.
 "I like cats 'cause they don't make any laundry,"
 he said, disguising himself in gas mask and stocking
 cap to flea dip the stray
 so she wouldn't recognize and hate him.
 Then he drove to Buster's Meat Chalet
 and bought her a beef kidney. He gave me
 a belt made of wind-
 shield wiper tubing and light-
 switch pulls last anniversary. And my epic love
 poem "The Effect of Metal Fatigue
 and Shear Factors on Mortal Males"
 appeared in *The Journal of Deadload and Liveload*
Stress Analysis dedicated to this worldclass
 bowlscraper nut
 grinder pizza
 cutter lid

opener 10-inch
 peeler baster
 giant cork-
 screw and melonballer,

Carmen Lionhart. He proves nothing's sexier than virtue
 in a man. Girl sisters, if you're tired of Mr. Fluffy
 Muscles at the gym, of Poptarts
 cheating on their wives and Peter Pans
 in search of nannies, if you want a man
 of affirmative action who'll clean
 your shades with spirit, hot wax
 your poodle, boil
 your mugwort, and rototill
 your garden so the subsoil's all churned up,
 better read your heart the riot act
 because he doesn't have a brother.

But if you meet a Pupcake knows his polypeptides
 from his spun concrete, women
 listeners, don't leave your find
 on layaway. Though it takes a while
 to warm up to abundance, expect more
 than slumgullion deglazed
 with lipperings for dinner, girl
 sisters, a man who'll be your help,
 team, play, work, ship, mess, love-
 mate, women listeners, I say
 a man like that is worth a wait.

EMILY GROSHOLZ

On Spadina Avenue

Driven by love and curiosity,
I entered the painted shops along Toronto's
Chinatown, and lingered
in one red pharmacy, where every label
was printed in mysterious characters.
Beside myself, not knowing what I stopped for,
I read the scrolling dragons, roots and flowers
intelligible as nature,
and quizzed the apothecary on her products.

Lovesick for my husband. She was puzzled,
for how could I explain
my private fevers to a perfect stranger?
I questioned her obliquely, hit-or-miss:
Lady, what's this button full of powder?
What's this ointment in the scaly tube?
Who are these dry creatures in the basket
and how are they applied?
The deer tails gleamed in fat, uneven rows,
unrolled sea horses darkened on the shelves,
and other customers with clearer motives
stepped in behind my back.

How could I say, his troublesome male beauty
assails me sometimes, watching him at night
next to the closet door
half-dressed, or naked on the bed beside me?
An evening amorousness keeps me awake
for hours brooding, even after love:
how fast in time we are,
how possibly my love could quit this world
and pull down half of heaven when he goes.

The patient Chinese lady has no cure,
 and serves her other customers in order.
 Across the curled-up, quiet, ocher lizards,
 the giant starfish and the ginger root,
 she turns to look at me.
 We both know I'm not ill with this or that,
 but suffer from a permanent condition,
 a murmur of the heart, the heart itself
 calling me out of dreams
 to verify my warm, recurrent husband,
 who turns and takes me in his arms again
 and sleepily resumes his half of heaven.

Dark Tents and Fires

Narrow, encompassing, unsystematic,
 those late Victorian houses used to stand
 forever against my will.
 Ten years ago I said: I want existence
 pure as Sartre's or Weil's, hardly a stitch
 of furniture, and all the world in books.
 I sank my souvenirs in hock or storage,
 and left the stubborn family walls behind.

Somehow their stones unravelled, over time.
 So now my heart returns,
 wishful imagining at last embodied
 in lamps and tables, dishes, embroidery,
 the wrack of my old worlds in Philadelphia.
 Worlds are multiple and have their seasons,
 it seems, no less materially sketched out
 than Bedouin settlements. Dark tents and fires.

How rapidly my generations faded
 and left their broken tapestries behind

for me to mend and set in different places,
 chairs to refinish, sofas to recover.
 I fold the tablecloths and count the spoons,
 some of them missing. Where?
 Lost in the trash, I fear, anonymously
 bent in evening news or toothed disposal.

Lost like my mother's letters, thrown away.
 Oh save them! Battered eighteenth century walls
 and fieldstone houses, great white sycamores,
 row houses with their porches
 facing Delancey, Arch, Spring Garden Streets.
 I count and count. The tablecloths are lace,
 the napkins linen. Who will wash and press
 these remnants, who will polish all the silver?

So many creatures withered from the source,
 and only domestic ritual to guard them.
 I raise my piecemeal household on the sand
 until another wave of emigration
 or dust or famine sends us all away
 or that day comes, named by a fatal number
 not infinite, but passing,
 my powers of inventory to command.

The Hawk

—from the French of Yves Bonnefoy

A number of years ago,
 at V.,
 we saw time come to meet us
 as we watched from the open window
 of the room over the chapel.
 It was a hawk, that flew
 to his nest in the crannied wall,
 holding a dead snake in his beak.
 When he noticed us,
 he shrieked in anger and pure distress,
 but without letting go his prey. Unmoving
 in the light of dawn,
 bird and snake together made the sign
 of the beginning, middle and end.

And over there
 in the country of summer, quite close to the sky,
 a number of vases stood together; from each
 a flame rose; and the color
 of each was different, whispering
 as vapor or dream, or world, beneath the star.
 One might have said, a conference of souls
 expected on an island pier.

I even believed I caught some words, or almost,
 (almost, due to a defect or an excess
 in the incapable power of language)
 pass like a trembling sigh of heat
 in the phosphorescent air, that reduced to one
 all those distant colors, some
 it seemed I'd never seen before.

I touched them, they weren't burning.
 I stretched my hand out, no, I gathered nothing
 from the clusters of that fruit other than light.

The Trees

—from the French of Yves Bonnefoy

We gazed across our trees, down from the high
terrace that was dear to us. The sun
stayed close to us once more
and yet withdrawn, a silent host
on the sill of the great ruined house, enlightened,
we'd long left in its keeping.

Look, I said to you, it makes the uneven
unknowable stone that holds us, ripple with shadows:
our shoulders melded to one,
the almond trees beside us,
the topmost edge of the walls, all run together,
a scorched and furrowed boat drifting away
like a gust of smoke, or dream.

But the oaks down there don't move,
even their shadows harden in the light.
Those are the banks of time, that in our world
can only flow. A land we'll never reach,
so rapid are the currents of our hope, so large with death.

We looked down on the trees an hour or more.
The sun held back against the stone
then, finally compassionate, extended
our shadows towards them, down the deep ravine
until they seemed to meet.
So sometimes, stretching an arm, one touches
briefly, in the distance between creatures,
another's dream, that flows by endlessly.

PATRICIA TERRY

For Mary Ann

There is on an imaginary scroll
a lady who stands very still
at the edge of a cliff;
if she waved,
the long sleeves of her gown would look like banners.
But it's too late for goodbyes—
there is nothing to see
of someone presumably sailing,
or being rowed,
and perhaps she already notices
she is alone,
that now she can't be sure
he is all right,
when sometimes with just a wall
between them she was afraid;
or perhaps it occurs to her
that she can stay up all night
if she wants to,
eat only mangoes and plums
for dinner,
cut her hair
just like my friend
whose husband of thirty years
said forget it
and she thought shall I die of this?
or buy a black leather jacket
in Tijuana

J. ALLYN ROSSER

An Open Fire

I would not trace your steps
from here to all the world
and back—but there are dusks
that fall without you
when the gaslight will not catch
and I can sense your eyes on others,
pick up the scent of smiles
they cast on you. I concentrate
on flame, make dinner glow.

Later, you tend the blue light
of the evening news
strobing our overheated den
and lean closer
as if quickened by disaster,
rapt in a fabulous safety:
leaking toxins, gagging streams
and all the unsafe elsewhere
you, by watching, make stay there—

like the first man on earth
watching darkness through an open fire
at the mouth of his cave.
What he cannot quite make out
won't hurt *us*,
though it pass near enough
to fling fantastic shadow,
ripple through alerted blood
and lick the thinning, blackened air,
this flimsy air before us.

What Was Clear

After the old friends and the new friends
and all the other guests were gone,
we sat at the table for hours
pondering contour and color,
forcing parts to interlock
and then thinking
better of it, thinking
maybe the puzzle was not
one, but two in one box.

No picture there to clue us in.
Still, edges were quickly complete
with corners and the usual sky.
On one side, the red of a barn
you called schoolhouse;
on the other, my cypress—
your oak. We squinted
and pressed, irritable
and hopeless by turns.

There was a lagoon at last,
with something there floating,
surely swans. But you laughed:
ducks. A white rowboat
after all, with a gap inside,
and something gray and something red
(two pieces we would never find).
A rag and a bucket, you said.
But it was a child with a pail.

MICHELE WOLF

Toilette

She lifts the white, lace nightgown
Over her head, waits for hot
Water to flow into the basin.
The billowing curtain sheer, tulip-appliquéd,
Rises with the breeze, revealing
The dogwood's veil of ivory blossoms,
Each with its nubby green core,
Soft-claw edges dipped in mauve.
She washes her face, slides
The washcloth along her armpits,
Between her legs, rinses.
A rush-hour traffic report—
Stalled tractor-trailer, half-mile backup—
Radios faintly from the bedroom
Across the yard. She brushes her teeth,
Inserts a contact lens, blinks,
Readies the next one, when an arm
Encircles her waist, a scratchy
Face rests in the curve
At the base of her neck.
Cut off by the mirror, her index
Finger holds out the clear,
Waiting lens to the light
Like a sacrifice. A tiny, malleable cup,
It adheres, balances, preens.
It knows it's been cleansed,
That after its nightly soak—eight
Free-floating hours lazing in saline,
On wave after wave of dreams—
It offers, with transparent
Pleasure, the power to see.

MARCIA B. SIEGEL

Strangers in the Palace

TWYLA THARP'S DEBUT AS AN ARTISTIC ASSOCIATE and resident choreographer at American Ballet Theater broke over New York in full force during the summer season at the Met. Tharp's daring move—disbanding her own company and throwing her potent choreographic gifts into ABT's arms—might turn out to be the nudge ballet needs to send it into the nineties. Or it might prove just another aborted mission in the costly game of ballet politics.¹

Tharp has had her share of raves, but she seems to have peaked in critical favor several years ago. Nowadays she isn't mentioned when pundits read the tea leaves for classical ballet, though she has probably contributed more to the development of classical style than any contemporary choreographer. In a remarkable recent assessment of Tharp's public reception,² *Newsweek* dance critic Laura Shapiro examined why this protean artist always seems to arouse suspicion, while critics and audiences are willing to indulge far lesser talents. Tharp, Shapiro thought, "is essentially and invariably avant-garde." Shapiro quoted long-time Tharp dancer Sara Rudner's definition of avant-garde as "not how weird your work is, but the integrity with which you go about doing the next thing."

Twyla Tharp's embracing of ABT commits her to a world that has little precedent for judging and appreciating her, and even this ratifies her status as an experimentalist. But it is what ABT has committed to Tharp that provokes controversy. While she clearly intends to continue her maverick ways, Ballet Theater sees itself as an institution responsible for the preservation of classical ballet. In taking Tharp into its ranks it has entrusted her with something more than just making novelties.

American ballet for some years has been in creative decline. While George Balanchine was alive, we could ignore the fact that virtually no outstanding new voices were emerging in a younger generation of classical choreographers. During most of the eighties, American ballet companies have been casting about for material, in the historical repertory—*Swan Lake* still sells big—and in the International styles that fuse classical and modern techniques into something that looks

¹At this writing, in late June, ABT artistic director Mikhail Baryshnikov has just announced his resignation, to take effect at the end of the 1990 spring season. This move will inevitably affect Twyla Tharp's future at Ballet Theater.

² "Ain't Misbehavin': Two Decades of Twyla." Lecture at the Dance Critics Association annual conference, San Francisco, June 10, 1989.

contemporary but doesn't tax the mind or the emotions. Forays into the world of postmodern dance seemed invigorating at first, but after several commissions and a couple of competitive funding projects aimed at linkups between the post-Judson formalist experimenters and the pointe shoes and champagne crowd, no style or lasting repertory has resulted. Instead of inspiration, postmodernism added just one more novel ingredient to the ballet stage. As the eighties drew to a close, classical companies turned to Tanztheater and other politicized European forms that actually denigrate classicism as a language and as a social phenomenon. Producers and critics are deeply ambivalent about the nature of ballet's future evolution. For so long that evolution was defined as wherever Balanchine took it, but now where do we go? Too much innovation may carry the form away from its particular mission, and too little may fix it in a lifeless mode of Balanchine replications.

One of the principal contenders for the saving of classical ballet is William Forsythe, the American director of the Frankfurt Ballet, whose *Behind the china dogs* was the hit of last year's American Music Festival at the New York City Ballet. Forsythe's modernism resides in his deconstructive techniques. He uses classical vocabulary—extends it, according to his chief supporter, Anna Kisselgoff of the *New York Times*—as one of many texts, to be chopped up, distorted, layered with other material, in violently theatrical dances. His posture is quasi-intellectual; his dancers are like demonic acrobats, ready to test the limits of human flexibility and endurance. Provocative and gripping though Forsythe's ballets may be, only one or two of them have remained in anyone's repertory for more than a season. Forsythe isn't interested in the development of classicism but its opposite. He may use the classical language but his purpose is to exploit and devalue it rather than ensure its continuing health. Even Anna Kisselgoff has expressed disappointment that "... he has settled into a formula for creating dances rather than a true esthetic." (*Times*, July 3, 1988)

The other darling of the critics at the moment is Mark Morris, who, despite his great musicality and compositional skill, has not yet been seen by anyone as inheriting the leadership of classical ballet. Morris is a modern dancer, his dances nonballetic or anti-balletic. Though capable of movement invention to suit a variety of periods and styles, his preferred look is an earthbound, deliberately graceless solidity and a mimetic rather than a decorative use of the upper body. Always an exhibitionist and provocateur, Morris has invited even more notoriety in the past year since he took over the Théâtre de la Monnaie in Brussels, former home of that other great anti-balletic showman-modernist, Maurice Béjart. His most balletic work to date was composed for the 1988 season of Ballet Theater. *Drink To Me Only With Thine Eyes* was praised by *New Yorker* guest critic Alastair Macaulay for its "casual grace and unforced wit," which Macaulay saw as Tharpian. (*New Yorker*, June 20, 1988)

It would take another whole study to catalogue the critical displacement and qualified praise for Tharp. Though she has influenced a whole generation of dancers and choreographers, something about what she's doing herself is always troubling critics. They think she's too slick, too angry, they think she makes fun of classical dancing, they think she makes fun of dancers. The single most unsettling thing about Tharp is her refusal to stand still. She disregards the canons, even those she herself created five minutes ago. This leaves critics in the risky position of having to evaluate everything she does with brand-new eyes.

She has been stylistically consistent—the Tharp “look” originated twenty years ago, from her body and those of her first dancers, especially Sara Rudner. Yet she has drastically changed subjects, modes, media. In addition to her own company, which underwent many turnovers of personnel, she has choreographed for ballet companies, ice skaters, basketball players, actors. Wherever she goes, she leaves behind a new perception of the body, new ways to see the choreographic process, dances that give enjoyment years after they're made. But the attraction to new venues, new sources, which count in Mark Morris' favor, in Tharp is considered a disadvantage.

Her three new works for Ballet Theater illustrate this unpredictability. Not only are the dances in three totally different styles, they propose three totally different ways to use and present dancers. I think each one is a small miracle of stagecraft and choreography.

Everlast is a pocket-sized musical comedy, with songs by Jerome Kern, a love triangle that works out for the best, a chorus line that fills up chinks in the rickety plot, and several extraneous but amusing characters Tharp created to give roles to dancers she couldn't use in the leads. It's set in a Gatsby-esque 1919, where two American mythic types, the fortune-hunting debutante and the parvenu prizefighter, submit to a brief, disinterested engagement that terminates when each of them falls for an unlikely substitute, a parlormaid masquerading as a sparring partner and a real sparring partner masquerading as Léonide Massine's Peruvian dandy in *Gaité Parisienne*.

There's no more choreography in the piece than is good for it, but what there is is an anthology of balleticized social dance styles from the period. There are lovely in-jokes referring to the ballet repertory, like the moment when the debutante, played by Susan Jaffe or Cynthia Harvey, arrives for her wedding. The entire cast lines up on the diagonal, with the Champ, Kevin O'Day, waiting at the downstage end. When the bride appears, all in white, the moment evokes the lore of ballet weddings, beginning with *The Sleeping Beauty*.

So *Everlast* is a thoroughly entertaining show, with everything unnecessary left out including dialogue, and everything else in the formula neatly fabricated. It's also a good-humored comment on the clichés of the old Broadway musical and the old spectacle ballet, the crassness of their producers, and the way ballet companies are now eyeing show business in their quest for successful new material. It

shouldn't be forgotten either that dancers, including Tharp and ABT director Mikhail Baryshnikov, aren't immune to the glamour of Broadway. No one is better than Tharp at taking a hard look at dancing and dancers with an attitude that is simultaneously serious and sardonic. The audience can swallow one side of this but not both, as was shown by its failure to appreciate Balanchine doing the same thing in *Bourrée Fantasque* when ABT performed it. Today, you have to be either trashing ballet, as Forsythe does, or treating it with deadly solemnity.

Tharp went deeper into farce with *Bum's Rush*, a work almost no one approved of and everyone enjoyed to some extent. Here Tharp was not only irreverent toward the conventions of dancing, she mixed her signals to the point of incoherence. *Bum's Rush* has three sets of dancers, who remain isolated most of the time but do occasionally encounter one another. There are classical ballet dancers, Gil Boggs, Elaine Kudo, and Ashley Tuttle, plus Sandra Brown, who appears as a pair of pointe shoes inside a huge rubber tire. Richard Colton and Shelley Washington are a pair of characters almost recognizable as that couple down the street who are a little peculiar. Kevin O'Day, Jamie Bishton and Daniel Sanchez form a trio whose finely calibrated moves are either harmonious or belligerent. In a preview performance at the Guggenheim Museum in April, Tharp identified this last group with her sister and twin brothers, who talked in code which only she could understand, and who were always fighting. If you didn't know this or the other clues Tharp passed on about the piece, you could see its humor as related to the comic violence of Saturday morning kids' cartoons.

Bum's Rush seems to be a homage to Tharp's pop-ridden childhood. It creates a world where the literature was made of celluloid (her parents ran a drive-in movie), where language echoed radio advertising jingles, where cruelty was a way of showing affection, and where people yelled in order to be heard above a roar of competing egos. I infer all this from things Tharp has said and dances she has made over the years. In fact, I think *Bum's* is a kind of successor to her semi-autobiographical *When We Were Very Young* and *The Catherine Wheel*, both of which pitted abrasive characters against each other without regard for their tenderness or autonomy.

Collage techniques are certainly not new, but people didn't know what to make of *Bum's Rush*. It was too unflattering, too fragmented. The new postmodernists usually find ways to make their heterogeneous choices more accessible. Martha Clarke covers the same period or locale from different points of view; John Kelly follows a single narrative thread in contrasting "languages." But Tharp's dance has no apparent story, no stylistic reconciliation. The action splats all over the stage, the beautiful (a great duet of leaping in two styles, by ABT's Gil Boggs and Tharp's Richard Colton, also ballet-trained) intercut with the dreadful (rude noises, pratfalls, collisions, hysterical laugh-

ter). *Bum's Rush* is violent, it's fast, it's graphic, literal, mundane, but it doesn't make sense. The dancers are phenomenal, but you can't love them. For these reasons, it strikes me as the most advanced post-modern piece I've seen this year, the one that truly reflects our culture.

I've always found Twyla Tharp's closeness to the real world admirable. What the audience wants, I think, is some sign of mercy, and this, so far, is not within Tharp's capacity. She is the most unsentimental of choreographers, the most hardened to the effects of passion. Her third new ballet, *Quartet*, is a virtuosic exercise for four of the company's high-powered technicians. (I saw Cynthia Gregory, Cynthia Harvey, Ricardo Bustamante and Jeremy Collins.) To a minimalist string quartet, *G Song*, by Terry Riley, the ballet simply explores a vocabulary with the most sophisticated compositional manipulations: counterpoint, canon, inversion, mirroring. The movement is extremely smooth and fast, with almost no pauses or stressed transitions between steps. I love its dryness, its assertion that we need attend to nothing except the spectacle of Tharp working at her craft. By the end of the season, when Gregory was beginning to get more free with the piece, more rhythmically flexible, it seemed an added bonus.

Dancers can illuminate and transform Tharp's work with their compassion, eroticism, personality, and that is also a mark of a great classical ballet. One of Tharp's greatest gifts is the ability to visualize the best in dancers, and over the years nearly every member of her company became an individual presence through some choreographic opportunity she provided. Whether she'll be able to do this for dancers at ABT is a question. That she can inspire them, galvanize them to action that is rich and invigorating, has never been in doubt. But can she hold their attention? At ABT she'll always be competing for rehearsal time, for dancers. She'll need extra coaching sessions to help them gain her special skills—speed, fluidity, intricate timing, an articulateness of the whole body—and the nonchalance, wit, and surprise that make her style unique.

Another serious question I have is what will happen to the dancers she brought into ABT with her. Of course they'll do her dances; except for *Quartet* they're featured in all the Tharp works now on view. But so far they haven't appeared much in any other repertory. The last week of the New York season, Shelley Washington made her debut as Madge the Witch in August Bournonville's *La Sylphide*. Washington, a marvelous dancer who under Tharp became a master of the exaggerated gesture and face, walked into this classic role as if she'd been born to it. But I was disturbed that Washington adopted whiteface makeup for the part. In these days of greater—if still inadequate—racial integration in classical ballet, it seems misguided to portray a gifted black performer as white, even if she is playing the villain. Madge could be a troll, a gypsy, a dark-skinned stranger from

a foreign land. In Bournonville's Romantic cosmos, this exotic Other represents the earthy aspect of the unknown or the supernatural, while the Sylphide is the ethereal side. Either one is a threat to the bourgeois society his ballets celebrate.

The other appearances of Tharp dancers didn't reassure me that these Others will ever be fully assimilated into ABT. Kevin O'Day mimed the Major Domo in *Swan Lake*, and at one performance of that ballet Daniel Sanchez was pouring wine. Will Elaine Kudo be reinstated in the roles she had when she left ABT a few years ago to join Tharp? The formation of a Tharp cadre within ABT might be efficient, but relegating these émigrés to low-status roles in all but their home idiom demeans not only their talent but their dancing skills.

Even if Tharp gets what she needs from ABT for herself and her dancers, I wonder if she'll want to stay. She can certainly see her work showcased there. In addition to the three new pieces and two recent Tharp Company dances (*The Fugue* and *In the Upper Room*) in the spring 1989 schedule, she has created a number of other ballets at ABT over the years: *Push Comes to Shove*, *The Little Ballet*, *Sinatra Suite* and *Bach Partita*. And there are other Tharp ballets and pre-pointe dances that I'd love to see ABT do. I wonder, though, if she will be content with simply maintaining her repertory and making new works. She's always said that's what she wants, and the reason for joining ABT in the first place was to achieve some stability without the necessity of raising the money for it. But Tharp is a contrary animal. Just when her fairy godmother hands over her third wish and you think she'll turn into a princess, she's quite likely to kick the stardust away and ask for something else. I'm not betting on Tharp in the role of Cinderella.

RICHARD HORNBY

Interracial Casting

JOSEPH PAPP, THE EVER-CONTROVERSIAL PRODUCER of the New York Public Shakespeare Festival, has been engaged in a feud with John Simon, former theatre critic of *The Hudson Review*, over the issue of interracial casting. When Simon faulted the casting of blacks in *The Winter's Tale* at the Public last spring, Papp responded by demanding that *New York Magazine*, where Simon has been reviewing for many years, fire the critic forthwith! Colleen Dewhurst, President of Actors' Equity, later seconded the motion. Critic-baiting is common in New York (Norman Nadel once defined a theatre critic as "a person who is criticized"), but this seemed an extreme example.

This case raises interesting questions concerning the nature of theatre. Right or wrong, Simon's view is not simple racism, as Papp was charging, but a considered position based on a naturalistic theory of drama, which is one that is widely held: Basically, actors play themselves. From the director's point of view, the ideal is to cast someone as close to the character being portrayed as possible. From the actor's point of view, the ideal is to replicate your real-life emotions on stage, honestly playing yourself rather than "hiding behind the character." From the audience's (and thus the critic's) point of view, you are supposed to "reality test" the performances against your experience of everyday life. Thus, if a white man on stage purports to have a daughter who is in fact a black woman, lights flash in your head. This could never happen! "Blacks do not belong in parts for white actresses," Simon was quoted as saying, "unless they can pass for white."

But how far do you carry this kind of logic? A quarter century ago, the then *New Yorker* critic Kenneth Tynan objected because the lead actress in Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Flower Drum Song* was Japanese-American, rather than Chinese-American like the rest of the cast. Most audience members couldn't tell the difference (an attitude that might itself be attacked as racist), but Tynan, an intelligent and discerning man, apparently found the contrast disruptive. At the opposite extreme, what do you make of an actor like Frank Silvera, a light-skinned African-American who had a distinguished career from the thirties through the sixties playing whites, blacks, and Hispanics, plus Chinese, Mexicans, Indians, and a Tahitian? Neither Tynan nor anyone else seemed to complain.

Contemporary literary theory tends to reject mimesis as a basis for understanding artistic response. Instead of regarding theatre as a

reflection of life, we should think of it as a system of conventionalized signs, whose meanings we respond to depending on our education and conditioning. In this view, we “read” theatre as a “text.” When it comes to race, what we read will depend not only on the color of the skin of the person on stage, but on what we are accustomed to in the theatre, and, of course, on what we have learned about race in everyday life. In a society that takes race very seriously, a black person on stage among white actors seems almost to be shouting “I AM BLACK,” even if race is not an issue in the play. But one can easily conceive of a society that would make little of it, just as we make little of the fact that a given actor may have blond rather than dark hair (assuming that hair color is not at issue in the play).

A few years ago, James Earl Jones, a great black actor, played the role of Judge Brack in an otherwise all white cast in a production of Ibsen’s *Ghosts*. The critics’ reaction was predictable: while some bent over backwards to be nice to Jones, they couldn’t help pointing out that there were, in case you didn’t know it, no blacks in nineteenth-century Norway. Casting Jones was a big mistake! At the same time, no critic took issue with the fact that the cast were speaking English, though I think nineteenth-century Norwegians actually spoke Norwegian. Speaking English was simply a convention, a neutral means for American actors to convey the play to an American audience, something that quickly slipped into the background if you thought about it at all.

What will it take for race to move similarly into the background on our stage? “Color-blind casting,” as it is often called, is clearly not possible unless our society itself becomes color-blind, which is not only unlikely but probably undesirable. Besides, there are cases when race is at issue in a play (a white Othello would indeed be a distortion), which is why Actors’ Equity makes them an exception to its recommended color-blind casting policy. What we *can* aim for is color-neutral casting, in which we accept the conventionalized nature of the stage, and suspend concern about the race of an actor unless the play itself stresses it.

The best way to achieve color-neutral casting on stage is to practice it as often as possible. Ironically, objecting to such casting is self-fulfilling; calling attention to it brings it to the foreground, when the goal ought to be to get it into the background. But a way to end such objections is for critics to stop reality testing, and examine their own subjectivity in the theatre; if they were honest with themselves, they would have had to admit that they soon forgot about Jones’s race in *Ghosts*, because his performance was so strong.

I did not see the contested production of *The Winter’s Tale*, but I did see two Shakespearean productions late last spring that mixed blacks and whites in major roles. Michael Kahn’s production of *As You Like It* at the Folger Shakespeare Theatre in Washington, D. C., used black women in the roles of Rosalind, Phebe, and Audrey, in an otherwise

white cast. (All the women were light-skinned, which immediately raises the question, what is a "black"? After a few days at the beach, most of the white actors in this production would have been darker than these actresses.) Accustomed to Kahn's interracial casting, Washington critics did not even mention race. What bothered some of them, and certainly bothered me, was not the performers' differing complexions but rather their differing levels of talent. There were good performances from some of the older actors: Rubber-faced Floyd King was a hilarious Touchstone, while Ted van Griethuysen was an unusual Jaques, middle-aged and pedantic, which made him very funny, but lost some of the darker overtones in the role, which is Shakespeare's comic Hamlet.

Sabrina Le Beauf, however, was a meager Rosalind. Although pretty and perky, she has a shrill voice, including a nervous giggle, and she overenunciated the verse in a generally labored performance. Also, Oliver has a line at the end of the play, that Celia is "brownier than her brother," i.e., Rosalind in disguise, which of course sounded ridiculous. Again, if race (or, more precisely here, color) is *at issue in the play*, then it should not be ignored; the line is minor enough to be cut. But frankly, Le Beauf could have performed in blackface with her hair kinked and I would have been happy, if something could just have been done about her manner of speaking.

The production had other visual blunders. In the script, Shakespeare satirizes the pastoral literary tradition by contrasting two affected literary shepherds with the genuine rustics, but in this production the poetic Silvius was barefoot and wore an old straw hat, while his beloved Phebe was dressed in a peasantish manner, just like Audrey, her rustic counterpart. Also, Duke Senior and his brother Duke Frederick were played by the same actor, Emery Battis, a common enough practice, except that Battis is a distinctive looking and sounding actor who made no attempt to differentiate the two roles. All in all, I found this a rather weary production, with some good moments, but a lack of overall style and focus.

By contrast, back in New York, *Cymbeline*, which followed *The Winter's Tale* at the Public, turned out to be harmonious and forceful. I had not expected much, since it was staged by JoAnne Akalaitis, who has a reputation as a coarse director, perhaps best known for her production of *Endgame* set in the subway. (Beckett sued.) She is a founding member of Mabou Mines, a company known for the talent of its actors and the inanity of its productions. Since many of its actors were in *Cymbeline*, I feared a production full of wild visual effects and crude contemporary parallels, at the expense of text and common sense. I was wrong. Visual it certainly was, often heavily-handedly so, with Victorian costumes and a strange, grotto-like set out of an Indiana Jones movie. Nevertheless, *Cymbeline* is a weird play to begin with (it manages to combine plots from Holinshed and Boccaccio!), which certainly needs a touch of the exotic if it is to work at all.

More important, most of the actors were very well spoken, and no liberties were taken with the text. The production was remarkably clear, telling the complicated story gracefully, so that even while laughing at the endless silly reversals and recognitions in the final scene (which even Shaw, a fanatic on not changing a word of Shakespeare, once rewrote), one understood what was going on and sympathized with the characters.

This clarity was achieved because the staging, though at times outlandish (the King glided in and out on a kind of clothesline, Iachimo appeared stark naked at one point, and Posthumus' dead parents and brothers, who appear to him in a dream, here wandered about the stage, unacknowledged, throughout most of the play), somehow never overwhelmed the action. More important, the acting was consistently good. I particularly liked Frederick Neumann's dignified, vigorous old Belarius; Joan MacIntosh's ruthless Queen (I mean it as a high compliment when I say that she reminded me of the wicked Queen in Walt Disney's *Snow White*); and Michael Cumpsty's melodramatic Iachimo, which he played with precision and wicked charm, with a wonderful gleam in his eye. I was less happy with Joan Cusack's Imogen; she seemed to have been chosen for her pre-Raphaelite look, since she resembles the Ophelia of Rossetti's painting, but she needed to be more mature and far more energetic for the role of Imogen.

There were three black actors in the cast: Don Cheadle in the relatively small part of Arviragus; Peter Francis James, who gave a polished yet sincere performance as Pisanio, Posthumus' servant; and Wendell Pierce, whose performance as the dunderheaded young schemer Cloten was funny to the point of burlesque, but again, was very well spoken. Frank Rich in the *New York Times* complained that if Cloten were black, his mother the Queen ought to be black as well. Yet white women can have black children. She is his mother by a marriage previous to her current one with King Cymbeline; we do not know who Cloten's father was, nor anything about the Queen's own ancestry. In the same vein, Arviragus' brother Guiderius was played by a white actor, Jesse Borrego, but we do not know what race the characters' mother was, nor anything about the ancestry of their father Belarius. If this seems like a tedious lesson in genetics, it was meant to be. If, for example, we see a blond-haired couple on stage with a brown-haired child (genetically impossible) we do not object, but if we see a light-skinned single parent with a dark-skinned child (perfectly possible) we might object, not for scientific reasons, but because our culture in a sense "points" to them. It is not *realism* that causes us to concentrate on the racial mixture, but rather the cultural codes by which we live, which condition our way of perceiving and thinking. Of course the distinction is *there*, on the stage, but we "read" that distinction as something important, in the same way that we read what is on this page as words rather than just black markings, because

of what we have learned and then internalized. In other words, “reality testing” is culturally conditioned, even though it does not seem like it. In his review of *Cymbeline*, Simon complained that “it is hard enough to believe that the bright Imogen would mistake [Cloten’s] headless corpse for her husband’s, but downright inconceivable when that corpse is black and Posthumus white.” It is indeed unlikely that an *American* woman would make such a mistake, because skin color would be one of the first things she would notice, but Imogen is not American, and it is not inconceivable that she might “read” other things.

After I wrote the above, a play opened at Playwrights Horizons called *Yankee Dawg You Die*, by Philip Kan Gotanda. It is a dialogue between two Asian-American actors, an older one who has survived by playing Oriental stereotypes, and a younger one who, because of his serious training and personal commitment, refuses such demeaning roles. Gotanda here is depicting the opposite side of the coin of traditional casting—not the way it excludes racial minorities from classic roles (these are primarily film actors), but rather the way it forces them into roles that are humiliating to the actor and degrading to his group. The Ching-Chong Chinaman, Dr. Fu Manchu, the wicked Japanese/North Korean/Chinese/North Vietnamese General who threatens the “Yankee Dawg,” are taken by audiences as reality, and become an excuse for oppression.

Gotanda’s plotting is clumsy; rather than shaping the conflict between the actors, by creating incidents that would bring it to a climax, he gives the characters lengthy exposition about their rather lurid personal lives, plus some windy, unmotivated metaphysical speeches. I also found the acting uneven; the actors worked well together, which is certainly important for this play, but Sab Shimono was too young for the older actor, and lacked voice, while Stan Egi was sometimes tense and busy as his younger counterpart. Nonetheless, *Yankee Dawg* is an honest, insightful challenge to the unwitting racism in our theatre.

Frank Silvera, in addition to being a successful actor, was also a great teacher of acting who taught most of today’s best African-American actors. He aspired to establish a theatre with a style of acting that he called “skinless.”¹ By this, he certainly did not mean color-blind; he was if anything an advocate of black pride. Out of that very pride came his insistence that black actors be taken seriously as artists, that they be judged by their skill rather than their color, that the experience of being black might prepare an actor well for portraying the universals of human experience. Influenced by French

¹ My comments owe a great deal to my doctoral student, Tommie Stewart, who has just finished her dissertation on Silvera, and who has taught me a lot about black theatre.

existentialism, he insisted on artistic freedom for blacks, whose human existence had to be recognized prior to superficialities like skin color.

The very purpose of drama, as of all art, is to liberate us from our everyday selves, to remind us of our connections with larger things. By insisting that an actor play only himself, and judging him only on the basis of that self, we are limiting both him and us, while witlessly perpetuating all the racial prejudices that are the curse of our culture.

Wendy Wasserstein's *The Heidi Chronicles* is a lifeless, vulgar play, rendered all the more irritating by the many awards that this non-playwright has won simply because she is a woman, writing on fashionable issues. Wasserstein does not even begin to know how to construct a play. Her characters are automatons, set in motion as targets for crude ridicule; her plots are aimless; her ideas are trite; her dialogue is pretentiously witless.

Heidi, originally performed at Playwrights Horizons, was transferred to Broadway last March in a surprisingly lavish production, starring the superb Joan Allen in a role well beneath her talent. In thirteen scenes, the play takes its title character from 1965 until today, purporting to depict the problems of an intelligent, single woman in contemporary society. Heidi encounters two men in her youth: A bright boy she first meets at a prep school dance, who eventually becomes a pediatrician, and who turns out to be a homosexual; and a smart-ass womanizer she meets at a McCarthy-for-President rally, who becomes a successful magazine publisher. She becomes the long-term friend of the former, despite his mercurial temperament, and the long-term lover of the latter, despite his many affairs and even his marriage to another woman. She takes a doctorate in art history; dabbles in feminism; becomes a professor; and finally, in 1989, when it is clear that she will probably never marry, she adopts a baby.

Joan Allen, tall, intelligent, beautiful, and charming, was marvelous last year as the dancer in Lanford Wilson's *Burn This*. That character became involved in a destructive sexual relationship similar to those in *Heidi*, but she was also articulate and energetic. This character does give two art history lectures in the play that are interesting and humorous in a low-key way, but when speaking with other characters she mostly hems and haws, and an extemporaneous talk to her finishing school alumnae degenerates into free-associative drivel. Heidi is so passive that she seems to be going through life in a daze. I could never understand why she doesn't tell the stereotypical folk who seem forever to be nagging her—the radical lesbian, the inane TV hostess, the Jewish American Princess, plus Heidi's two loudmouth boy-friends—simply to go to hell. Nor could I understand why a woman as attractive as Joan Allen should be limited to a homosexual and a compulsive philanderer when it comes to men.

The tacked-on, upbeat ending where Heidi adopts a baby (a girl, of course) also seemed implausible, a *dea ex machina* intended to demonstrate that a woman can find happiness and fulfillment without a husband. Thousands of American couples would like to know how a single, fortyish woman managed quickly to adopt a healthy white infant who, we are told, is intelligent and beautiful. In terms of the drama, moreover, *I'd* like to know how a character who has so far seemed totally unassertive suddenly found the courage and drive to adopt a child. It takes a lot of time and effort; you don't just pick them up at Bloomingdale's.

I liked Thomas Lynch's set designs early in the play, when he achieved a wide range of locales with simple means—a few hanging streamers to suggest the prep school dance, the bottom half of a huge museum banner to suggest the front of the Art Institute of Chicago. As the scenes progressed, however, the settings became ever more elaborate and mechanized, with revolving *periaktoi* (three-sided prisms) and sliding floor panels shifting walls and furniture about, until the stage floor seemed as cluttered and busy as a railway station. The growing ponderousness was a visual synecdoche for the play itself, which might have been a simple, unpretentious treatment of a young woman's life, but which turned into a cumbrous morality play about Everywoman in the Eighties.

By contrast, Lee Blessing's new play *Eleemosynary*, given a limited run in May at the Manhattan Theatre Club, bends over backwards to avoid making any kind of allegorical statement at all. It deals with three generations of eccentric women in a well-off American family: an elderly, endearing crackpot who consults spiritualists, and builds wooden wings for manually powered human flight; her daughter, a biochemist who resents her erratic childhood but who neglects her own daughter; and their granddaughter and daughter, a logophiliac who won a national spelling bee with the word "eleemosynary."

Despite resonances from classical literature—the Icarus myth, the virgin/matron/crone trinity—the play relentlessly focuses on the women's personal relationships and problems, at the expense of any larger social or metaphysical statement. The plot is nil, but the characters are fun to watch, and the play is mercifully short, a one-act requiring about 80 minutes to perform. The action consists of the characters' recollections of their lives, sometimes told directly to the audience and sometimes acted out. The grandmother speaks of her youth, how her father prevented her from going to college and forced her into a marriage with a worthy dullard; instead of leading to a feminist thesis, however, these are simply presented as bare facts, a justification for her eccentric life style. "Eccentricity became my life. I thank God for it," she says. "No one holds an eccentric responsible."

The biochemist daughter ran away from home in her youth and lived in hiding until her mother diligently tracked her down. When she had a child of her own, she began teaching her to speak

incorrectly, calling her hands her feet, etc., to make her seem a bit retarded, in hopes that the grandmother would find her uninteresting! It didn't work. Grandmother and granddaughter became devoted to each other, until the biochemist in desperation left them together to go off to live and work in Europe. The granddaughter is so enchanted with language that she chants obscure words like "sortilege," "shivaree," and "logodædaly" like a litany; the bitterest disappointment in her life was when she learned that there were no adult-level spelling bees!

Lynne Meadow's staging of *Eleemosynary* was simple and deft, while the three actresses—Eileen Heckart, Joanna Gleason, and Jennie Moreau, in order of decreasing years—worked well with one another, giving a strong sense of family. Heckart, a fine actress, was particularly funny and charming as the grandmother. But in the end, we were left with a play about the odd lives of unusual people, who seem untouched by the world around them. In Blessing's Broadway play of a few years back, *A Walk in the Woods*, a Russian diplomat and an American diplomat discuss power politics at great length, but never seem affected by it personally; we almost feel that even if there were a nuclear war, they would be off in the woods chatting about it in a civilized manner. In *Eleemosynary*, three intelligent women have intense personal relationships with one another, but similarly live in a vacuum. I suppose that is better than a play like *Heidi Chronicles*, straining to make big statements—but not much better.

Close Encounters of a Devilish Kind

CHODERLOS DE LACLOS'S NOVEL *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* (1782) is a product of its age in two senses: it is in epistolary form, a dominant narrative mode of the eighteenth century; and it embodies the conflicting philosophical and political impulses of this, the so-called age of reason. On the one hand, the French *comédie larmoyante* and *drame bourgeois*, as well as the English sentimental comedy, sentimental tragedy, and sentimental novel, were arguing with Rousseau that man was by nature good and could remain so by following his instincts, that is, the promptings of his heart; evil persons, for their part, could be reclaimed (at the same time they might be punished) if their hearts could be touched, if the callus of their vice could be penetrated to reveal beneath the soft skin of their virtue. On the other hand, the Marquis de Sade was arguing that the "promptings of the heart" were in fact the products of reason, of teaching and socialization, not of instinct, which modeled itself after the chaos of the world and obeyed the laws of desire. Sentimental literature was designed, of course, to appeal to the growing middle-class audience, to assist that audience in developing its own, self-congratulatory moral code and social ethic. Anti-sentimental literature—in the form of the libertine novel of eighteenth-century France and the English Restoration comedy before it—was designed to confirm the shrinking upper classes in their unsentimental self-knowledge and in their ability to use their superior intelligence to *liberate* themselves: from repressive moral codes, from political domination, from social subservience of any kind. Sexual intrigue and indulgence play such a great role in this literature partly because, for the idle and wealthy, gaming is the natural pastime, and sexual gaming is the most natural pastime of all.

Laclos's *Les Liaisons dangereuses* is set in Paris. So too was Roger Vadim's modernized film adaptation—*Les Liaisons dangereuses* 1960—set in Paris, but in a city whose sexual climate had changed enough to vitiate the movie, as Jeanne Moreau, who played the Marquise de Merteuil, has pointed out:

We made a mistake by setting the modern version of *Les Liaisons dangereuses* in Paris. There as . . . in New York, immorality is entirely in the open and is taken for granted. We should have set it in some provincial town where sexual relationships are kept secret and could still provoke a scandal, such as Lille or Lyons or Beverly Hills.

Mme. Moreau may be right, but I'm glad that Christopher Hampton's screenplay for *Dangerous Liaisons*, based on the play that he adapted from Laclos's novel, is faithful to the time period as well as the setting of the original. Hampton makes *us* wonder what he and the director, the gifted Stephen Frears, saw in the original, as opposed to *telling* us, in an updated version, what the original's significance is for our time. Yet another version of *Les Liaisons dangereuses* is reportedly forthcoming, directed by Milos Forman, which makes us wonder even more what the fascination of this work is—and also fear what the clever but facile Forman will do with it.

There are seven major correspondents in Laclos's *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, and all of them appear as characters in *Dangerous Liaisons*—characters who remind us of their origins in epistolary fiction by periodically exchanging letters with one another during the film (the very first shot is of someone's hands holding a letter, which itself bears the title of the film): the Marquise de Merteuil, a young widow and arch manipulator of men; the Vicomte de Valmont, her former lover and an inveterate womanizer; the Présidente de Tourvel, the young and pious wife of a magistrate (a Président, or presiding judge) away on business in Burgundy, and the closest we shall come to a bourgeoisie; Cécile de Volanges, the young and innocent daughter of Madame de Volanges, who has recently arranged the girl's marriage to the Comte de Gercourt, a former lover of Merteuil's; Madame de Volanges, confidante to Merteuil (her cousin), the Présidente de Tourvel, and Rosemonde, and one of Valmont's many previous sexual conquests; the Chevalier Danceny, a young music tutor and suitor for Cécile's hand as well as eventual lover of Merteuil; and Madame de Rosemonde, Valmont's eighty-year-old aunt, who is the Présidente de Tourvel's close friend and the owner of a country estate between which location and Paris the action alternates.

The plot hinges on Merteuil's desire for revenge against Gercourt for his engagement to Cécile, and on Valmont's desire for yet another night in bed with Merteuil. Valmont agrees to seduce the fifteen-year-old, convent-bred Cécile, but regards this as such an easy task (!) that he won't accept Merteuil's renewed favors unless he is also able to bed Tourvel, whose religion and virtue present him with a real challenge. Valmont succeeds easily with the young virgin, as he predicted, but must work so assiduously at seducing Tourvel that after he finally does, he realizes that he is as passionately in love with her as she is with him. Merteuil realizes this, too, and refuses Valmont his night in bed on the grounds that he has breached the rules of their game: to achieve purely sexual consummations that are then rapidly and dispassionately severed. Valmont severs his relationship with Tourvel but Merteuil still refuses him his prize, so jealous is she of his love; Valmont counters by arranging the first sexual liaison between Cécile and Danceny, Merteuil's own most recent conquest; and Merteuil retaliates by telling Danceny of Valmont's affair with Cécile. Danceny kills Valmont in a duel, but before dying the vicomte hands

over his letters from Merteuil and Tourvel to the young man, thereby exposing the marquise's machinations and causing her public humiliation. Tourvel has retired to a convent, where she lapses into madness and dies; Cécile, who has miscarried Valmont's child, will eventually enter a nunnery as a postulant; and the remorseful Danceny will opt for a life of celibacy as well by joining the Knights of Malta.

In Laclos's novel, Merteuil soon contracts smallpox, becomes so disfigured that she loses an eye, and loses a lawsuit and with it her fortune, whereupon she flees Paris for Holland. In Hampton's dramatic adaptation as in the film version, we see none of this. We last view Merteuil on stage playing a game of cards (just as we saw her at the start of the drama) as the shadow of a guillotine falls on the rear wall of the theater—a somewhat heavy premonition of the French Revolution and the beginning of the end of the aristocratic class. Hampton's film ending is lighter in touch than both his stage ending and the ending of the novel, and it fills in the "sentiments" that Laclos had only outlined. The last shot of *Dangerous Liaisons* is a close-up of Merteuil in front of her dressing-table mirror, removing her makeup after her humiliation at the opera, where her former friends booed her as she stood alone in her box; the film had begun with a shot of her face in that same mirror as she was preparing to make herself up. The implication is that there are two Merteuils: the heartless, egotistical one "made up" in the mirror, and the real woman beneath with a heart and with love to give rather than desire to slake. After Merteuil removes the last of the makeup from her pale face, she stares blankly—at herself—and tears begin to fall as the screen slowly fades to black. She cries at her own ruin, her own folly, but also at the death of Valmont, for whom she had begun to have genuine feelings. Valmont, for his part, tearfully declares before his death both his love for Tourvel and his sorrow for the licentious life he has led: "Her love is the only real happiness I have ever known"; "[Danceny] had good cause [to slay me]; I don't think that is anything anyone has ever been able to say about me." Ironically, it is Valmont's love for Tourvel that gets him killed in Hampton and Frears's interpretation. As he duels with Danceny, Valmont flashes back to his lovemaking with Tourvel even as the film cross-cuts to the scene of her being bled with leeches in the convent; their deaths thus become visually intertwined with their love, or their love becomes a kind of death. Tourvel dies of her love, and Valmont dies of his: clearly the superior swordsman, he lets his guard down at one point as his memories of Tourvel overtake him, and Danceny takes the opportunity to run him through. Our final look at Valmont is from on high, along with, by implication, a judgmental God: in a stunning high-angle shot, we see him lying on his back in pure white snow, his servant and Danceny hanging over him and a long, thick trail of blood leading randomly away from his body.

Like sexual gangsters, Merteuil and Valmont have had their way,

up to a point, and like dutiful spectators, we have thrilled to their exploits, up to a point—the one where moral duty intervenes and we assent, with God, to their penitence and punishment. Religion triumphs at the end of *Dangerous Liaisons* more than revolution, sentiment more than slaughter, conversion more than conquest. The greater truth of Hampton's film ending, as opposed to his stage ending, is that the bourgeoisie assimilated, rather than assassinated, the aristocracy, that the sentimental view of life outflanked, rather than outmatched, the anti-sentimental one. Sentimentalism acknowledged that good souls like Tourvel could be tempted to commit evil precisely because they were so good and trusting; and that even souls as evil as Merteuil could be made to see the error of their ways, precisely because their evil had finally consumed them together with their victims. If Sade's "instinct" obeyed the dictates of universal chaos, then sentimentalism's "heart" obeyed the dictates of providential design, and that design is adumbrated more by the omniscience of film form than by the discontinuous first-person narration of the epistolary novel. In *Dangerous Liaisons*, we see events as they happen from the point of view of an omniscient camera/narrator not bound by time, space, or self-interest; we get Laclos's fragmented and disordered fiction, told by several different people who don't know the whole story, converted into a complete and ordered film, told by someone who knows all. At the same time, Stephen Frears does his best to preserve the immediacy, intimacy, and secrecy, even solipsism, of the letter-form by shooting much of *Dangerous Liaisons* in close-up, going so far (too far?) as to rack focus—to alter the focal plane within a shot—in order to isolate a character in medium close-up in the foreground of the image while turning the background (of which Frears has given us a compensatory glimpse) into a blur. The "epistolary" close-up alternates with Frears's omniscient, and highly skillful, cutting among scenes (something he also did superbly in *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* [1987]) to give us what Laclos's novel really cannot, as no other novel could, either: the paradoxical sense that we share in the immediacy of confidences exchanged at the same time that we are in the hands of a silent divinity who overhears, and oversees, everything. We put together the pieces Laclos gives us as we read the 175 letters of the novel; as we see the film, someone else is putting the pieces together, for us as well as for the characters.

Glenn Close plays the Marquise de Merteuil, and because of her earlier role in *Fatal Attraction* (1987) as the criminally psychopathic professional woman, as the feminist ideal become twisted and self-defeating (with a healthy assist from the patriarchal family), it is tempting to read her character in *Dangerous Liaisons* as an eighteenth-century version of Alex Forrest. Indeed, Merteuil herself encourages this view when she says to Valmont, "I was born to dominate your sex and avenge my own." And even old Rosemonde speaks for wariness of male domination when she warns Tourvel against her Don Juan of a nephew: "Women enjoy the happiness they give; men enjoy the

happiness they feel. Of Valmont this is doubly true.” That Laclos had more than a cursory interest in his society’s oppression of women we know from his essays *On the Education of Women* (written 1783–1793, but unpublished in his lifetime), in which he declares,

The question, then, is to find out . . . whether in society’s present condition a woman molded by what is considered a good education would not be quite unhappy remaining in her place and quite dangerous if she endeavored to leave it. . . .

The experience acquired from centuries [of oppression and scorn] taught [women] how to substitute cunning for brute force [in order to make their lives easier]. They came to feel that since they were the weaker sex, their only weapon was their sensuality; they realized that if they were dependent on men for protection, men could become dependent on them for pleasure. . . . (my translation)

Certainly the above applies to Merteuil, but it’s only part of the story. *Dangerous Liaisons* is not about an oppressed woman who uses her beauty and sex to liberate herself from male tyranny; it’s about a somewhat socially restricted wealthy woman who uses her intelligence, beauty, and sex to *tyrannize everyone*, women as well as men. Merteuil avenges *herself* by her actions, not all the members of her sex. And it is in this sense that she is more a female variation on a male libertine than a crusader for the empowerment of women. Physically, Glenn Close is perfect for the part, since her icy beauty (if that’s what you can call it) has a distinctly masculine tinge to it. She’s *handsome*, I mean to say; John Malkovich as Valmont, by contrast, is not—at least not to these masculine eyes! Malkovich the man is nearly effeminate in manner—not exactly the quality you want in Valmont—and he seems here like a Method actor who has tried to transform himself into the character from the inside out, except that he never got to the outside, to the way Valmont walks, talks, and gestures. Valmont *lives* on his glittering surface, until that surface is finally shattered by Tourvel; Malkovich lives in his guts, which is why the revelation of his passion for Tourvel is somewhat anticlimatic, to put it gently. He’s helped, however, as are all the actors, by the *look* of this film, by Philippe Rousselot’s cinematography. Anyone who thinks that good cinematography—cinematographic *art*—is easy to achieve should compare Rousselot’s work in *Hope and Glory* (1987), where it was limited by John Boorman’s childish conception to being merely serviceably pretty (lipstick, I’d call it), with his work in *Dangerous Liaisons*, where its cool use of color (a respectable portion of it supplied by the costume designer, James Acheson)—of pale blues and greens, muted browns and blacks, wan whites and yellows—underscores the superficial coolness with which the film’s two main characters transform the heat of sex and the ardor of love into just another game of hearts.

Dangerous Liaisons is a kind of religious work in that one of its aims is to describe the war between good and evil in human character; good, or “poetic justice,” may win out in the end, but for much of the film evil has had a field day, and doubtless it is this field day that accounts for the film’s popular success (as it did for Laclos’s novel). *Under the Sun of Satan* (*Sous le Soleil de Satan*) is a religious film of the highest order, and that is because its main character, Abbé Donissan, is at war not only with himself but with the whole world: with the paradoxical existence of evil in a world that is the product of God’s perfect goodness. Evil has a field day in this film, too, but it is the kind that provokes the mind and soul more than it tickles the senses. The last words of the curé of Ambricourt in *Diary of a Country Priest* (*Le Journal d’un Curé de Campagne*, directed by Robert Bresson in 1951 from the novel by Georges Bernanos [1936]) were “All is grace”—words of spiritual certitude that Bernanos quoted from the diary of St. Thérèse of Lisieux, herself the subject of Alain Cavalier’s *Thérèse* (1986)—but on the last day of his life Abbé Donissan felt compelled to utter, “Say who is master, You or Satan!” *Under the Sun of Satan*, the first of Bernanos’ eight novels, was written in 1925, the same year Donissan’s historical model, Jean-Marie Vianney (1786–1859), the curé of Ars, was canonized (as was Thérèse). Maurice Pialat, a Frenchman born in 1925, completed the film version in 1987, when it won the award for Best Film at the Cannes Festival. Two years later, this film finally arrived in, but quickly departed from, New York. So much the worse for New York; so much the better for Charlottesville, Virginia, where it recently surfaced and I got to see it for a third time.

We meet Abbé Donissan in the film as he begins his first assignment as a priest: assistant to Abbé Menou-Segrais, the pastor of the country parish of Campagne. Donissan—an awkward young priest in contrast with the older, higher-born Menou-Segrais—has been permitted to receive his holy orders despite his poor academic performance at the seminary and his superiors’ doubts about his ability to minister to the faithful. As Menou-Segrais shaves Donissan’s tonsure in the opening scene, the young priest expresses his own doubts about his suitability for the priesthood, along with his frustration and anger at the omnipresence of evil in the world, an evil that he nevertheless feels he cannot successfully combat except as a priest: “I am an ignorant, uncouth priest, powerless to make himself loved”; “priests are so wretched; they spend their lives watching God be humiliated”; “I only learned to know evil from the mouths of sinners.” But Menou-Segrais sees something in Donissan that has long lain dormant in himself: the most precious of the Holy Spirit’s gifts, spiritual strength, which the pastor knows is of far more use to human souls than the savoir-faire he has developed over a long and comfortable—yet, in his words, empty—career. Menou-Segrais declares his perception in the film’s second scene, after he finds that Donissan has nearly fainted from the punishment long inflicted on his body by a filthy, bloodstained hair

shirt; and the older man sets the younger one on the road to the fulfillment of his vocation as a doctor of souls.

In Bernanos' novel, these two opening scenes are one long one. Pialat and his screenwriter, Sylvie Danton, chose to break it into two for two reasons. First, and most obviously, a movie has to *move*, especially when its subject is as weighty as this one. Novels may have the luxury of long, uninterrupted scenes in one place, but films rarely do. The reader's mind can dwell on such a scene—that's what minds are for—but the viewer's eye wants to *see*—it must see in order to know—and it's happiest when it's on the move, so that it can see more: in this case, another room in the priests' residence, Donissan's eremitic cell. This very principle is built into cinematic structure through the editing that goes on within and between scenes (as here), and through cross-cutting, the intermingling of shots from two or more scenes occurring simultaneously—a device borrowed from the novel, yes, but intrusive there when used as extensively as it is in films (and used less frequently by novelists since the advent of film). But there's a second, more important reason why Pialat and Danton divided Bernanos' long scene in two, and it has to do with the visual as well as verbal manner in which films tell a story—with the visual information and suggestion that a film, without the novel's facility for digression through description, must compress into a scene that is literally *not* moving. (Since *Under the Sun of Satan* is so contemplative, there is very little camera movement within scenes—I recall only a few slight pans; and there is a reliance on the two-shot and the long take, as opposed to cutting from face to face, when two people are in conversation, which is often the case in this film. When cutting is used, as in the very first conversation between Donissan and Menou-Segrais, it's used so much that whatever visual interest was created through the initial alternation of shots is soon used up: what remains in its place is visual *division*, if not opposition.)

Under the Sun of Satan begins with the somber, ominous music of stringed instruments (composed by Henri Dutilleux), which we will hear before or after—never during—four other strategic moments, so that this music functions as a kind of celestial chorus, a sigh of tristesse, that separates itself from rather than runs underneath the action, like most film music: its goal is not to underscore the emotion of a scene and thereby disappear into it, but rather to stand outside the scenes and, through its sameness each time it is played, poignantly to mark their relentless progression. The credits, appropriately for this meditation on the enduring presence of evil in a world spotted with good, consist of white titles on black backgrounds. The opening conversation between Donissan and Menou-Segrais is photographed in light so low in key that it cannot really be called light; let's call it instead the semi-darkness just before nightfall. This scene is shot from a slight low angle, so that we get a view of the room's low ceiling cutting off the characters' space. The music before the scene, the cutting and framing within it, the lighting: all signal our entry into a

living netherworld whose priestly occupants, despite their ability to reach each other through language, fundamentally exist in isolation. Once the scene shifts to Donissan's room, the framing becomes tighter and the lighting changes in two significant ways. First, the key light is used to place half of Donissan's face in light, the other half in darkness—and this occurs, ironically, at precisely the moment Menou-Segrais blesses him for the strength of his holy spirit. We'll see the key light used again and again in this way during the film: to split Donissan's face, thus suggesting his self-doubt or self-division, his obsession with the power of evil to such a degree that it is debilitating, that the spirit of evil is able to enter his own life and color his actions; and beyond Donissan, to split entire rooms into areas of darkness and light, rooms in which God and Satan vie for control over human souls. The second significant lighting change in Donissan's room is the suffusion of the image with an eerie but beautiful bluish tinge, achieved by means of filters and occurring repeatedly throughout the film. Pialat and his cinematographer, Willy Kurant (who shot Godard's *Masculine-Feminine* [1966], among other films of the French New Wave), wanted, I think, to suggest not only the battle between darkness and light, but also the *union* of the two, the combination of both, easy or not, that exists in most people and in the world at large. And the best way to do this was through the subtle use of blue, the color that is the perfect synthesis of darkness and light, and that Kurant could even more unobtrusively incorporate into scenes played against a blue sky.

In contrast with the curé of Ambricourt in *Diary of a Country Priest*, Abbé Donissan of Campagne is beloved by his parishioners and esteemed by them as an inspired and inspiring confessor. In part this is because they see him as one of their own—he is a physical, a physically clumsy man, not a slickly cerebral one, and to his surprise, his “imperfection,” as he sees it, has worked in his favor; in part Donissan has succeeded because he has been blessed by God with so great a gift for combatting sin. Still, despite his joy at being filled with God's grace, Donissan is not satisfied. He continues to mortify his ample flesh against the advice of Menou-Segrais, at one point scourging himself with an imposing set of rosary beads, and he continues to be troubled by the ineradicability of evil—by its almost easy coexistence with good—in a world that God, in His “sovereign sagacity,” saw fit to create. *Under the Sun of Satan* is structured around three confrontations with or instances of the power of evil experienced—almost conjured up—by Donissan.

The first occurs during an eight-mile trip, on foot, to the village of Etaples, where his zeal as a confessor is needed to complete the final day of a retreat. During this trip, which begins in the sepia shade of late afternoon and reaches into the darkness of night, Donissan loses his way in the vast landscape (twice photographed in extreme long shot, in which we nearly lose sight of him), only to be redirected toward Etaples by a horse-trader who suddenly appears and begins

walking alongside him. This “horse-trader” turns out to be an incarnation of Satan, sent *by God* to mark Donissan with the sign of Satan’s hatred (which he does with a kiss on the priest’s mouth!): that is, to impress upon Donissan God’s complicity in the persistence of evil and thus in the dual nature—indeed, the infinite complexity—of His creation (a duality or synthesis suggested by the very title of the film). Before disappearing, Satan gives Donissan the gift of reading souls, of knowing, like God, the inmost secrets of human beings. “See yourself in me,” Satan mysteriously says, and we learn what he means when Donissan encounters sixteen-year-old Germaine Malorthy, nicknamed Mouchette,¹ at dawn on his way back to Campagne after abandoning his trip to Etaples. “The Story of Mouchette” makes up the longish Prologue to Bernanos’ novel; it is followed by Part I, which begins with Donissan’s arrival at Menou-Segrais’s parish on Christmas Eve. Bernanos has been criticized for his awkward fusion of Mouchette’s story with Donissan’s, especially since she disappears completely in the second and last part of the book, which takes place when the priest is an old man. Pialat and Danton solve this problem by beginning the film with Donissan’s story, cutting to Mouchette’s right before the priest is dispatched to Etaples, then joining the two stories in the countryside outside Campagne; also, the director and screenwriter have Part II occur only a few years after Part I, so that Donissan still has visions of Mouchette. The priest thus gets the initial focus he requires, the editing itself quickly establishes that his and Mouchette’s stories will join up, and more of a connection is established between the power he exercises over her and the power he fails to exercise, in Part II, over a dead boy.

Donissan comes upon Mouchette after she has killed her lover, the morally as well as financially irresponsible Marquis de Cadignan, who had got her pregnant but refused to run away with her to Paris; and after she has been turned down for an abortion by her other lover, Gallet, the unctuous local doctor and deputy to the national assembly, who also rejects her remorse over the murder of Cadignan: he tells Mouchette that because she fired at the marquis at such close range, his death has been ruled a suicide, the case is closed, and she should not worry. The married Gallet clearly wants to continue to have sex with the girl, which he does during this meeting, and which even Cadignan did before she shot him. The only child of an anti-clerical, domineering father, Mouchette is deeply troubled and desperate in addition to being passionate and proud. And if her men provide her with no solace, neither does religion, since she says to Donissan that “God’s a joke. God means nothing to me.” She is on her way to her dead lover’s grave when she meets Donissan, and he unsettles her even more by reading her soul, by declaring her a murderess and

¹ Also the name of a similarly agonized adolescent who is the titular character of Bernanos’ seventh novel (1937)—filmed, like *Diary of a Country Priest*, by Robert Bresson (1967).

fornicator. Mouchette is frightened by his miraculous knowledge of her deeds, despite—or perhaps because of—the following assurance from Donissan: “You are not guilty before God . . . You are like a plaything, like a child’s toy ball, in the hands of Satan.” Like Satan’s toy she is, too, when she returns home to her parents and commits suicide by cutting her throat. Donissan had believed, correctly, that his ability to read human souls was a gift from God. What he learns is that in God there is Satan, and in Satan there is God: his God-given ability to read human souls has resulted, not in good, but in further evil—the mortally sinful suicide of a sixteen-year-old girl. Donissan madly tries to restore Mouchette to God by rushing to her home, seizing her dead and bloody body, and placing it upon the altar of Campagne’s church, where he kisses and caresses it in full view of her astonished mother and a number of parishioners. For this outrage he is relieved of his duties and sent for “cure” to the Trappist monastery at Tortefontaine.

We next find Donissan in Lumbres, where he is pastor of a small parish and is as revered by his congregation—and by pilgrims who come from other parishes to confess their sins to him—as he was in Campagne. The absence, however, of any cinematic device to indicate the passage of time between Parts I and II suggests that the priest has not been “cured” of his obsession with evil’s abiding presence in the world, and the immediate appearance of Mouchette’s ghost to him in his attic room confirms this view. Soon he is called to the neighboring parish of Luzarnes to heal a boy dying of meningitis; when he gets there, the boy is already dead and his mother beside herself with grief. So confident is the local pastor, Abbé Sabroux, of Donissan’s powers that he urges him to attempt to bring the boy back to life, which Donissan does, only to let him slip quickly back into death. Upon raising the child’s limp body to God and commanding, “Say who is master, You or Satan!” Donissan realized that he had blasphemed and aborted the miracle. Unable to trust the grace with which God had infused him and recalling Satan’s role in the suicide of Mouchette, he demanded of God the smiting of Satan—and got instead his own smiting and the triumph, yet again, of darkness and death. Donissan’s literal smiting occurs shortly thereafter. On his way back to Lumbres, he prays, “Lord, if I am still useful, don’t take me from this world” (a line not found in the novel), and after hearing a large number of confessions upon his return, he dies in his confessional: his eyes look up, his body is contorted in the small space allotted it, and a strange white light bathes his face. In the novel, the old Donissan survives the self-inflicted corporal punishments of his youth to be pastor of Lumbres for thirty-five years, only to succumb in the end to a heart attack brought on by angina pectoris. In the film, the fairly young Donissan is certainly not in the best of health, given the various mortifications of the flesh he has practiced and the long hours he has worked, but because of his relative youth, his death seems as much a negative answer to his prayer as a negative response

by his body. It is Menou-Segrais, on a visit to his former assistant, who finds him dead. Menou-Segrais, like Mouchette, is totally absent from the second part of Bernanos' book, and his touching reappearance in the film serves to give it even greater unity.

Maurice Pialat himself plays Menou-Segrais—quietly, authoritatively, transcendently, as if he had been sent from on high to direct Donissan in his spiritual quest. Pialat began his career as an actor before directing his first feature, *L'Enfance nue* (*Naked Childhood*), in 1968. Prior to *Under the Sun of Satan*, his forte had been the naturalistic examination of love relationships in crisis and transition; I'm thinking particularly of *Nous ne vieillérons pas ensemble* (*We Will Not Grow Old Together*, 1972), *Loulou* (1980), and *A Nos Amours* (*To Our Loves*, 1983). But, of course, one could say that his new film is itself about a love relationship in crisis: Donissan's, with God. And one could also say that *Under the Sun of Satan* is a species of naturalism: unlike Martin Scorsese in *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988), Maurice Pialat has understood, as did Carl Dreyer and Robert Bresson before him, that the fundamental requirement of an authentic spiritual style is that it be grounded in naturalistic simplicity, even abstraction, not in wide-screen pyrotechnics. The spirit resides within, in internal conviction, not in external trickery. So naturalistically simple, and simply presented, is the rural world surrounding Donissan (illumination by candlelight, work and travel in horse-drawn vehicles) that, for much of the film, we think we're in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century—until the priest returns from the incident with the dead boy in Luzarnes as a passenger in a comparatively modern truck, and we realize that his world is not so remote from ours, in reality or in spirit. Satanism still thrives among us, as the latest news reports make clear; the difference, however, is that Donissan's Satanism grows out of profound religious belief, not violent religious travesty, out of deep self-abnegation, not gross self-aggrandizement.

Gérard Depardieu, who has acted for Pialat in two other films (for whom hasn't he acted?!), is Donissan, and he supplies generous amounts of the internal conviction the role requires. To the physical awkwardness of Bernanos' priest, Depardieu adds bulkiness. I kept thinking during his performance of Delmore Schwartz's poem "The Heavy Bear Who Goes with Me," of how the "withness" of Depardieu's body stood in such stark and humble contrast to the flight of his spirit, especially conveyed through his searching, restless, mole-like eyes. Sandrine Bonnaire, who has also previously acted in two Pialat films (once with Depardieu), is Mouchette. Bonnaire is too old for the part—she was twenty when the film was made and looks older—but she brings to it the same quiet fierceness that made her so compelling in Agnès Varda's *Vagabonde* (1985). She's another kind of vagabond here, one whose chiseled exterior belies a seething, deracinated interior. Together, Bonnaire, Depardieu, and Pialat—all three by their own admission agnostics, if not atheists—have created a miracle of a film, and I for one thank God (and Satan!) for it.

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HAROLD FROMM

Anthony Storr: Redrawing the Circle of Illness and Health

DESPITE YEARS AS PSYCHOTHERAPIST, and Lecturer in Psychiatry at Oxford, Anthony Storr has had time to produce at least nine books (by my informal count) over the last few decades, two of which have appeared within the past year alone. These books seem to fall into three categories: those one would expect, on psychoanalytic subjects like aggression, destructiveness, and sexual deviation; those related to his "mentor," Jung; and those—like the latest pair—about creativity and the arts. I put "mentor" in quotation marks because despite his favoring of Jung over Freud, Storr is no wholesale endorser of Jungian ideas. In his 1973 book on Jung (in the familiar "Modern Masters" series) he wrote, "Jung, with his emphasis upon the spiritual, as opposed to the physical, aspects of human nature, provides an important and necessary counterbalance to Freud's obsession with the body." But he then feels impelled to add, "It is easy to lose patience with Jung, as I have myself at times. More especially, I find it difficult to sympathize with his preoccupation with the occult; with his views on synchronicity, and with the ghosts and poltergeists which throng his autobiography."

Remarks like these send a clear signal that Storr is no party-line thinker and they reflect the sort of speculative independence that has enabled him to arrive at his own strikingly humane outlook. Indeed, in the introduction to *The Integrity of the Personality* (1960) he announced: "The beliefs about human nature which the psychotherapist himself holds will partially determine both what he finds in his patient, and also the relative emphasis which he places upon his various findings." To this he forthrightly added, "There is a widespread idea that the man of science holds no theories in his own field except upon evidence. This is not so. Scientists, like novelists or poets, have their own vision of the universe; and their vision is not based primarily on evidence." This is a position that is nowadays—almost thirty years later—quite the thing in fields like rhetoric of science. And most recently, in one of these newest books, he writes: "What I am concerned with here is the similarity between the actual process of creative discovery as it takes place in the mind of an artist and that in the mind of a scientist. A new scientific hypothesis and a new work of art have in common that both are the product of mental activity in

which abstraction, fantasy, and playing with various combinations of concepts all take place."

*Solitude: A Return to the Self*¹ is an extended, loosely organized, ruminative essay (in the most general sense of "exploratory discourse") that synthesizes the writings of a lifetime and, incidentally, makes it apparent why Storr should have found Jung so much more congenial than Freud. *Churchill's Black Dog*,² a collection of (for the most part) previously published essays, provides several more fully worked out set pieces that could serve as elaborated footnotes to *Solitude*. (I am treating these books as if they were one, quoting freely from both.) Speaking of Edward Gibbon's solitary, celibate, but notably happy and productive life, Storr remarks, "It is only since Freud advanced the notion that heterosexual fulfilment is the *sine qua non* of mental health that anyone would question Gibbon's status as a more than commonly happy and successful human being." Thus rejecting the post-Freudian obsession with "object relations," Storr's foundational stance throughout these books is that

two opposing drives operate throughout life: the drive for companionship, love, and everything else which brings us close to our fellow men; and the drive toward being independent, separate, and autonomous. If we were to listen only to the psycho-analytic 'object-relations' theorists, we should be driven to conclude that none of us have validity as isolated individuals. From their standpoint, it appears that we possess value only in so far as we fulfil some useful function vis-à-vis other people, in our roles, for example, as spouse, parent, or neighbour. It follows [i.e. if you accept this view] that the justification for the individual's existence is the existence of others.

Because Freud's notion of health involved a *bodily* (and thence a psychological) accommodation with the reality principles of adult life, fantasy was invariably somewhat suspect, an escape from adult sexuality into infantile wish fulfillments. Speaking of Freud's vision as "puritanical," Storr proposes "that an inner world of phantasy is part of man's biological endowment, and that it is the inevitable discrepancy between this inner world and the outer world that compels men to become inventive and imaginative." It was Jung's emphasis on adult development and his definition of the self as a fusion or balance of conscious with unconscious, neither to be slighted in the interests of the other, that Storr has found so heartening. "It is those who can find no way of expressing or resolving their conflicts [between conscious

¹ SOLITUDE: A Return to the Self, by Anthony Storr. The Free Press: \$17.95; Ballantine: \$8.95p.

² CHURCHILL'S BLACK DOG, KAFKA'S MICE, AND OTHER PHENOMENA OF THE HUMAN MIND, by Anthony Storr. Grove Press. \$19.95.

and unconscious] who become neurotic." And fantasy (i.e. aesthetic creativity, among other things) is a chief way of achieving such expression, for it is a "way" rather than a mere escape route.

Given Storr's picture of adulthood as a negotiation between inner and outer, as more than just a working out of childhood neurosis by means of the reality principle and socio-sexual adjustment, solitude and creativity necessarily obtain a major place in his scheme of things. Indeed, solitude, for Storr, is "The School of Genius" (the title of the English edition), the fertile forcing ground of civilization. In presenting his case for a "return to the self," Storr shifts the center of interest in human life from an almost exclusive preoccupation with the reproductive years that characterized the biological and psychological sciences of the 1940s and 1950s to an interest in mature adulthood, Jung's interest. Socialization, object-relations, "normality," the need for love, sexual adjustment, marriage, offspring, family life, Freud's lack of interest in patients over fifty because of their supposedly fossilized mental powers—all of these are readable in his discussions as elements of what can *now* be perceived as a "paradigm" (a word he does not use). Perhaps the extension of the human life span in the West has contributed to this insight, since the startling growth of a post-reproductive age group would certainly require re-vision of what it means to be a person, unless one were prepared to write off half the population. Although Storr himself takes all of this in stride, a reader of these books is jolted by a sudden recognition that Western culture's favoring of the reproductive years has been "merely" one possible paradigm among others. (In saying this, I certainly wish to avoid any suggestion that the reproductive paradigm is part of an evil and repressive past, or that *we*, in our great enlightenment, are on the side of the angels. Rather, earlier paradigms were suited to the realities of earlier societies, when "merely" being able to reproduce and stay alive past twenty-five was no small feat.)

"Emotional maturity," then, can be regarded not just as psychosexual adjustment to the reality principle (i.e. learning to control yourself through sublimation) but as the capacity to be alone, to have an interior life, a life that creatively weaves experience of the world together with the peculiar quirks of the individual psyche. As Storr puts it, "Learning, thinking, innovation, and maintaining contact with one's own inner world are all facilitated by solitude." "If the individual regards the external world merely as something to which he has to adapt, rather than as something in which his subjectivity can find fulfilment, his individuality disappears and his life becomes meaningless or futile." Or as he puts it most succinctly, "Man was not born for love alone."

With such an outlook, it is no surprise that Storr's focus is particularly directed upon the lives of creative figures in Western culture, both aesthetic and scientific, most of whom led solitary, celibate, sometimes tortured but sometimes happy lives. As a man of

cultivation in literature and music, Storr draws most of his examples from the arts; although there are also several from the sciences. Shakespeare, Gibbon, Keats, Trollope, Tennyson, Beatrix Potter, Edward Lear, Kipling, Henry James, Kafka, Saki, Wodehouse, C. P. Snow, Golding, Beethoven, Richard Strauss, Newton, Kant, Wittgenstein, Churchill—he ranges among them all, providing a perspective different from the ones we are used to. If there is any general theme that unites these figures, besides their solitude and creativity, it is the fact that their survival was often made possible by these selfsame elements of their lives, given their highly strung and hypersensitive personalities. Although it might be objected that “ordinary” and “normal” people get through life quite well without solitude and creativity, a protest against this view would be in order: when the reproductive years are over, many people fall apart as their lives come to seem vacant and aimless—and the obvious question is, why keep producing more people who will fall apart when they stop producing more people who will fall apart etc., etc.? In the past, most people did not live beyond their reproductive years. Indeed, it was often their reproductive years that killed them—from childbirth or venereal disease. But the situation now has greatly changed, creating alternate possibilities.

When Storr looks at Newton, Kant, and Kafka, to cite a few cases, he is ready to concede certain pathological aspects to their lives, generally stemming from deficient relations with their parents or a weak sense of identity, but he is also disposed to see their wounds as enabling strengths. “Kafka was not psychotic; but I believe that it was his writing which prevented him from retreating into a world of psychotic fantasy. For writing is a means of communication, and therefore a means of retaining contact with others, albeit at a distance.” Of Newton he concludes, “Although, especially in youth, sexual preoccupations and the need for personal relations may distract a man from his work, emotional isolation, with or without celibacy, goes hand in hand with supreme abstract mental achievement.” Since Storr values these mental achievements highly, whether in the form of late Beethoven quartets or Kafka’s stories, he feels that the solitude and introspection that produced them are “biologically adaptive” as well as the source of inestimable gifts for the human race, gifts that contribute meaning and pleasure to large numbers of people. And one might go further by adding that the reproductive life produces its own ills and misery, confers its own pathologies and devastations. In an era when more people survive than die and when contraception is the rule rather than the exception, the social imperatives that previously made reproduction mankind’s number one goal no longer press with such urgency.

To look back on human history and see this reproductive imperative as now “merely” a paradigm—one mode of existence among others—is a by-product of Storr’s outlook that may very well have

operated only at the periphery of his consciousness. The idea does not appear in these two books as any sort of boldly enunciated statement. But wittingly or not, by validating solitude Storr has redrawn the circle of illness and health, of abnormal and normal, of madness and sanity, in such a way as to transform still another element of human experience from nature into culture. Although there have long been religious enclaves that valued the spiritual over the physical, Storr's thinking has updated the spiritual into usable contemporary terms. It is, of course, more than a little ironic that this endorsement of a "return to the self" should be made at a time when the idea of the self (and a lot of other things) is being exploded by the sweeping tide of the Cultural Materialism movement, which claims to be (but of course is not) all for an abandonment of the notion of a "self." This vogue, drawing upon Marx, Foucault, and the New Historicism, and very hot among the high-tech cultural theorists of academia, sees the social as the real and the real as the social, and would replace the imperatives of reproduction (which it doesn't take up) with the imperatives of collectivization. But that is another—and somewhat sticky—story that I dare not embark upon just now.

WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD

Realism without Magic

WITH THE OUTCRY OVER SALMAN RUSHDIE'S NOVEL, we have become newly conscious of fiction's power to offend, and an omnibus review such as this may offend, in its small way, by the peremptory fashion in which individual fictions, including Mr. Rushdie's, are treated. But the last few months have brought more than the usual share of interesting titles, confirming one's sense of how much good work is being done out there, more of it than any single reader can begin to keep up with. The following remarks do no more than point to and describe some recent satisfactions and dissatisfactions in the experience of this single reader, beginning with a quite delightful and sometimes moving "family chronicle" by Rand Richards Cooper.¹ *The Last to Go*, a first and wholly professional book of related stories, takes a fresh look at familiar territory—parents and children and a suburban upper-middle-class community thoroughly staked out down to its last Flexible Flyer sled or Corvair with the rear engine. These twenty-six stories are centrally about the decline and fall of a marriage and are narrated by various members of the Slattery family over different time periods. We are taken from the father Daniel Slattery's first meeting with his wife-to-be (he will be a surgeon, she a mother and housewife) up through their son Toby's post-college perspective on things. The blend of narrators and narrative tones is artful, the touch unsentimental—in fact, consistently humorous, even as things domestic go to pieces.

There is an easy assurance about Mr. Cooper's writing, as if he'd been at it for decades. One random example, the opening paragraph of "The Yardman," in which the Slatterys struggle with a slightly ominous (or so the wife Mary Ellen is convinced) employee named Bob Treat:

The Slatterys always had mixed luck with yardmen. A lot happened on their acre and a half of earth, and finding the right man to cope with it was never easy. The grass was patchy under the huge maples out front. Fallen mulberries dissolved into rot, dandelions puffed and popped, garbage floated off the street and throttled the pachysandra, a drunken woman drove her Pontiac through the hedge right into the magnolia tree. When Dan and Mary Ellen first moved in, they had done the yard themselves. It

¹ THE LAST TO GO, by Rand Richards Cooper. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. \$16.95.

was more picnic than work; they'd bring out tools, clippers, a transistor radio, a bottle of wine. But the yard grew more and more ragged, until finally they caved in and hired someone.

Like Updike, Mr. Cooper's subject is "middleness" with all its "grits, bumps and anonymities" (Updike's words from "The Dogwood Tree"). But the casual expertness of procedure in the passage just quoted, its unassuming way of making the point about how yard care changed from picnic to work, makes Updike sound, by contrast, positively baroque. In the final, italicized paragraph of the book's title story, the son Toby falls asleep, hearing the voice of his mother, seeing his father's car rounding the corner, sensing "the big white house"—the house of his youth—looming overhead. By this point the cumulative force of the linked stories is such that concluding them with a slightly elevated claim feels wholly appropriate: "*Everything is in place, where it belongs. It will always be there. It will never go away.*" Hard to praise a young writer without sounding like a wise old discoverer, but I hope readers will discover Rand Richards Cooper for themselves.

Another young writer, David Leavitt, has been praised by Doris Grumbach (in words about this, his third, book) for permanently widening the scope of "the customary family novel" by "including gay and lesbian offspring into the lives of parents and relatives."² And that's so—you can't deny that Danny, the novel's hero, is gay, and that his sister's a lesbian, while poor mom and dad are merely screwed-up heterosexuals, and mom with cancer to boot (she finally dies in agonies). But that one can go along with Grumbach's adjectives for the novel—"rich, funny, varied, and *true*," seems more doubtful, especially since Mr. Leavitt tends to commit straight-faced sentences like the following (with reference to Danny's lover Walter, a lawyer): "Walter, who was at the time in his second year at Yale Law School, was in the company of seven women graduate students whose lesbianism, where not proclaimed, was at least incipient." Danny and Walter are just your ordinary yuppie couple, but Leavitt invites us to think about them with some tenderness as, when watching a pornographic film, they "held hands, grateful for love and each other in such a strange, cold place." Not much "fun" there, but plenty of warm idealism.

In places it looks as if Leavitt may be about to subject this boring couple to some satire, especially when he makes a good list of their electronic possessions, which include—among many others—

two nineteen-inch color television sets; two wireless remote-control VCR's; a Japanese stereo system with separate graphic equalizer

² EQUAL AFFECTIONS, by David Leavitt. Weidenfeld & Nicolson. \$18.95.

and compact disc player . . . two sleek computers, each with a modem and printer; many kinds of software; a telephone that answered itself and redirected calls to other numbers; three air conditioners; a Cuisinart; a microwave oven . . .

(I must stop, green with envy.) Yet except for concluding, not surprisingly, that “electricity hummed through the house,” little is made of the whole business (although Walter is into pornographic games as played through his computer—I am too un-user-friendly to figure out how this was done). The final section of the novel in which mom dies while the family gathers round, I found merely depressing. It’s too bad that David Leavitt has to bear the cross of being a Trailbreaking Gay Novelist; but the family in this book seems too much like a circus act that might, with a few more tears and laughs, get picked up by television.

Susan Kenney’s *Sailing* was one of the best novels to come my way in 1988, so it would most surely have been high on my Top Five list for the National Book or Book Critics Circle awards it didn’t win.³ The married couple in this novel, Sara and Phil Boyd, were first seen in Kenney’s *In Another Country* (1984), where one saw, also for the first time, the impressive resources of this novelist’s style. Phil’s struggle with a rare cancer and his wife’s stubborn refusal to let him and herself give in to it, is the central fact of *Sailing*; and the boat that Sara buys her husband, two years after the operation that almost killed him, is—very possibly for both their minds—a ship of death. The narrative of *Sailing* is dense, complicated, and finally extremely satisfying, although only a second reading of the novel convinced me of the rightness of its ending. Along with the pleasures of narrative complication—the movements back to the past, the alternations of scenes of sailing with scenes in the hospital (both habitats written about with knowledge and passion)—there are the deft movements of Kenney’s own style, ranging from high lyrical to low comic.

Here, at the novel’s opening, is Phil, registering the feel of things at the dock of the Indian Cove boatyard where he and Sara have come to look things over:

The air is so warm now it’s hard to believe it’s no longer midsummer. But all around them as they’ve driven from yard to yard looking at boats, the trees have been flagged with autumn colors, the leaves so bright they seem to flicker and change before his eyes and he feels pulled along by the pressure of their turning. He has found that if he stares closely enough he can freeze that burning look into an image as still and permanent as a painting done on glass. As he stares now across the bay at the surrounding

³ SAILING, by Susan Kenney. Viking. \$18.95.

hills and islands, the landscape takes on that flatness, that brittle luminous clarity of detail. He blinks. The sharpness dissolves; the truth is, the foliage is already past its peak.

High lyric for the man coming to grips with his mortality. But as with the changes of pitch and tone in the previous novel, *Sailing* doesn't remain long on any single note. Driving down to Boston with her husband for his noon appointment at the hospital, Sara feels "a thrill of doom, a sense of having goosed the gods by leaving the place in such a mess":

If they were to be killed right now, whoever came in after them would get the shock of their lives; whiskers and dried toothpaste spit in the bathroom sink, crumbs on the table and down the cracks, beds hastily made up with last week's sheets, fly carcasses moldering in the overhead lights, dust lying like gray plush along the window-sills and tops of doorways, layers of unexaminable trash rising inexorably in the bottom of every closet, bureau drawer and cupboard, ready to spill out like so many guilty consciences. A veritable Pompeii of a mess, their sudden deaths falling over it like ash, transfixing it forever in people's minds. "Oh yes, the Boyds, they lived like pigs."

Such intensity of realization at whatever level it occurs is consistently present in Kenney's prose, whether it gives us Sara sorting through junk to take to the dump, or she and her husband asking life and death questions of one of the many physicians who dot the book. The finest, most memorable scenes in *Sailing* are the medical and hospital ones, where professional lore and a carefully thought-out story unite in a series of sequences as harrowing and affecting as anything I know in the literature of disease:

"I'm not going to let you go down the tubes without a fight," Sara says, and he, weary and dizzy and drugged to the gills with stuff for his high blood pressure, his anxiety, his kidney failure, his sinus infection, lies there staring at the round determined face, feeling like a lost mountaineer who wants nothing more than to go to sleep forever in the warm snow of the mountain pass, instead finds himself dug up, dragged out wet and shivering, caught in the soft but firm jaws of some huge, resolute St. Bernard.

Susan Kenney's is the poetic imagination par excellence, making something permanent and valuable out of life's hard but not always cruel news.

Brad Leithauser's extraordinary productivity—two books of poems, this, his second novel, many critical essays and reviews, in addition to professional success (MacArthur and Guggenheim fellow-

ships)—has made him rather a target for those who resent clever formalists who write with ease.⁴ After high praise for *Hundreds of Fireflies*, his first book of poems, and for his previous novel *Equal Distance*, there may be discernible some ganging up on their successors. The poems in *Cats of the Temple* were deemed by certain reviewers to be merely or too “clever,” and the new novel has also incurred charges of shortcutting the heart in favor of heady mind games. In fact, *Hence* is full of feeling, even at moments bursting with it, and the elaborate novel-within-a-novel Mr. Leithauser has contrived (with Nabokovian-Barthian rigor) does little to defuse or even ironize the intensity of its central story. This story is of Timothy Briggs’s encounter with the world of 1993 as centered mainly in Boston-Cambridge, the “Totaplex” hotel where he is located courtesy of the Congam corporation—sponsors of an extended chess match between Timothy and ANNDY, a computer chess program that can search 365,000 positions in a second. Himself author of a *New Yorker* article about computer chess, and of a recent piece on robot and human intelligence, Leithauser treats such matters with a bracing and witty spirit that is also highly informed. Throughout *Hence* the writing is as crisp and fresh as the following sentences about an M.I.T. philosopher named Zehnder, father of the ANNDY program, who discourses with enthusiasm about the new machines:

The nice thing about computers writing music . . . is it’ll allow us backward-mobility. For somebody like me, who thinks Bach’s the greatest genius ever lived, the world can’t get enough Bach. The world needs more Bach *music*, and computers are gonna have to supply it. People can’t seem to go backwards, to an earlier style, that’s one of the many ways they’re inflexible. But machines can go backward. They don’t have a backwards and a forwards—that’s one of the ways they’re our superiors.

So that non-lovers of atonal music are in luck: “The whole-tone scale! You don’t like ’em? You want something hummable? Then the computer’s never *heard* of atonal music.” During this discourse, Zehnder devours a mocha bagel filled with pistachio walnut spread—food plays an attractively comic role throughout *Hence*.

Timothy’s story is told in a novel published in 1997 by his older brother Garner and titled *Hence*, and (courtesy of Mr. Leithauser) this story proceeds with subtlety and liveliness up through Timothy’s flight back to his Indiana hometown and his resultant pursuit there by Garner. The episode culminates in a lovely scene where the brothers walk at night to the playground of their old elementary school (Timothy’s twin brother was accidentally killed there as a child) and

⁴ HENCE, by Brad Leithauser. Knopf. \$18.95.

where they engage in a fine, painful and passionate argument about life and death, fate, the past. After this scene Timmy returns, accompanied by his small-town sweetheart, wife-to-be, to Cambridge and the Congam chess contest—and I began to lose my grip on the tale. An especially dense closing chapter, about stories and voices and sounds, spoken from nowhere in particular by a very ingenious narrator indeed, eluded me as—unlike ANNDY—I failed to search out the possibly adequate positions. Whether the problem lies with Mr. Leithauser's overreaching or my dimwittedness is less important than that the novel's substantial body, and its writing from beginning to end, are impressive manifestations of creative power. *Hence* is a significant advance over Leithauser's entertaining but relatively relaxed *Equal Distance*.

An even more astonishing phenomenon (as productivity goes) than Brad Leithauser is the Englishman A.N. Wilson, who at age thirty-nine has published four biographies (most recently a splendid one of Tolstoy), a couple of critical books, and ten novels. *Incline Our Hearts* is billed as the first in a projected sequence and its materials are familiar ones—the growing-up of a young man in post-World War II England.⁵ Inevitably Mr. Wilson must be compared with Anthony Powell (forty years older) whose *Music of Time* sequence might well discourage younger writers from embarking on the extended story of a life. But for all the eccentric characters and meditative passages Wilson shares with Mr. Powell, the stylistic distance between them is immense; Wilson's prose is easy and unambiguous, with nothing like the tortuous fun of Powell's. In fact the book's intensity level is low indeed, its narrative voice mainly ironic in its leisurely observations—here about English public school life compared to a Soviet labor camp:

What counts is that the inner torment is identical—the sharing of insanitary conditions with too many uncongenial people, the strange friendships and distrusts which grow up among fellow-prisoners, the same fear of the system which never quite leaves you. The only major difference is that *their* Gulag is something of which the Soviet Government is ashamed, denying its very existence, whereas the English system of private schools is openly boasted about, one of the great glories of the world.

The novel never varies from that thoroughly composed manner of delivery. It has fine episodes of sexual and domestic comedy, and it represents an interesting change in tone and view from earlier, sparkling A.N. Wilsonian entertainments like *Scandal* and *Love Unknown*. How well this new manner will entertain over the long haul

⁵ INCLINE OUR HEARTS, by A.N. Wilson. Viking. \$17.95.

depends perhaps on how long the haul; but this writer is never less than fully intelligent, a master of scene and sentence.

Saul Bellow's novella is billed as his first fiction with a woman protagonist and his first to appear as a paperback original.⁶ These facts are perhaps less significant than that *A Theft* is written in the style Bellow has cultivated recently. A friend of mine, having read through Bellow's work, much of it for the first time, suggested to me that what this writer was really notable for was "a line of talk." That seemed to me a good way to look at the narrative of *More Die of Heartbreak*, Bellow's last novel and a book which for all its insufficiencies (or so they seemed to me) as story has something verbally interesting happen on nearly every page. The story of *A Theft*, involving a woman's loss and eventual recovery of her emerald ring (and, not at all incidentally, her relationships with various men and husbands) seemed to me on the thin side, so I found myself reading for moments that reminded me of how idiosyncratic and powerful a writer Bellow has been, can still be. Perhaps deliberately, the energy wattage doesn't burn as high as it might in this novella, but there are moments when an ominous life stirs in the prose, as here with Clara headed for an important appointment:

That she should be so firm and assertive was strange, seeing that she was in a fever, trying to regulate an outflow of mingled, soiled emotions. In the cab—one of ten thousand cars creeping uptown—she leaned her long neck backward to relieve it of the weight of her head and to control the wildness of her mind, threatened with panic. These gridlocks on Madison Avenue, these absolutely unnecessary mobs, the vehicles that didn't have to be here, carrying idle shoppers or old people with no urgent purpose except to break out of confinement or go and scold someone. Clara was suffocated by this stalling and delay. She exploded engines in her mind, got out at corners and pulled down stoplights with terrible strength.

This is the real thing, and it took me back to that other novella—Bellow's masterpiece, *Seize the Day*—where story and style are inseparable and function to produce maximum pity and terror. *A Theft* doesn't get close to pity or terror (though the moment quoted above moves in their direction) and its comedy seemed oddly restrained and muted.⁷

A few words only about two books nobody wished any longer, by novelists who have both been praised for their employment of "magic

⁶ *A THEFT*, by Saul Bellow. Penguin Books. \$6.95p.

⁷ As for the woman as hero, Bellow was asked on some talk show whether he knew enough about the sex to put one of them at the center of a book. His reply: "Well . . . I should . . . and if I don't, then I've suffered in vain."

realism.”⁸ I’ve disliked that label ever since encountering it in relation to Marquez’s *Hundred Years of Solitude* (or was I merely disliking Marquez’s novel?), especially when it’s spoken of as a “technique” writers “use” (or “utilize” as the students say). The idea behind Mr. Davies’ book (the third in a trilogy of which I haven’t read the earlier two) is enough to sink the whole enterprise—a Canadian foundation’s completion and staging of an E.T.A. Hoffmann opera called *Arthur of Britain, or the Magnanimous Cuckold*. Contrary to appearances, Davies is not Bernard Shaw; donnish, labored, and with a depressing interest in Jung, he is simply not funny. My career as a Davies reader has concluded almost before it began.

As for Salman Rushdie, well he’s not all that funny either, compared, say, to Thomas Pynchon. But he’s plenty clever, up-to-the-minute in worldwide high-and-lowbrow allusions, always eager to launch out on another story. I liked the scenes involving one of the two central characters who fall from the airplane—the Saladin Chamcha figure, an Indian turned London TV personality—in which we get some lively glimpses of “Mrs Torture’s” England. But as the novel goes on and on and on, magic realism feels like elephantiasis, a hyped-up frenzy of being “hilarious” and “hallucinatory” about bloody everything. Anyway, the book itself has gotten lost in the seemingly endless, important-but-boring paragraphs and declarations, defenses and analyses of What Muslims Believe; so that the best approach is via the soft pedal.⁹ But whatever *The Satanic Verses* does do, it doesn’t touch the heart.

Who touches the heart these days through mere fictions? When is just plain realism better than “magic realism”? As exemplified by some of the writers considered here, realism is better when it doesn’t work too hard to achieve “stunning,” larger-than-life effects; when it has time to care about place and dailiness; when it takes the trouble to address the reader from someplace else than from on high (and mighty). Over the past fifteen years, Andre Dubus, speaking out of the Merrimack Valley of northern Massachusetts and southern New Hampshire, has practiced an exemplary realism in his stories and novellas. Twenty-three examples are gathered together in this handsome volume, and there isn’t a page on which something of the sensuous (often sensual) and emotional feel of life isn’t registered.¹⁰ In the best of the gathering—“The Winter Father,” “Killings,” “The Pretty Girl,” “Rose,” “The Fat Girl,” and “Adultery” (it is too bad he

⁸ THE LYRE OF ORPHEUS, by Robertson Davies. Viking. \$18.95. THE SATANIC VERSES, by Salman Rushdie. Viking. \$19.95.

⁹ The most egregious of these that came to my attention was a letter by a Yale academic inviting me (all of us) to sign on with her and claim joint responsibility for Rushdie’s book, since, you see, we had *all* written it, were *all* involved in History etc. I declined the invitation with ease.

¹⁰ SELECTED STORIES, by Andre Dubus. David Godine. \$22.50.

couldn't include the wonderful "We Don't Live Here Anymore," my introduction to Dubus)—we find recorded, with equal knowledge of and sympathy for both sexes, the lives of men and women who do not read *The Hudson Review*, who eat eggs and bacon for breakfast, and who actually spend too much time in bars. That one is made to care about these lives and their stories, without going slumming, or engaging in useful pity for the passed-over products of capitalist industry, or even admiring them as vigorous Lawrentian creations of blood-consciousness—this is an indication of Mr. Dubus' quite remarkable achievement as an American writer about Americans.

TOM WILHELMUS

Seduced by the Available Daydream

THE EIGHT STORIES IN GARY KRIST'S *THE GARDEN STATE* are, for the most part, pleasant, humorous, well-crafted, and uplifting.¹ Although they are often ironical and once even a little sinister, they also evoke feelings of humaneness and well-being, albeit in an environment, contemporary New Jersey, where such qualities may be difficult to come by. The final few sentences provide a coda for the whole tenor of the book:

So this is our life now. . . . We'll spend a few hours eating and drinking, then a few hours working. At eleven or midnight, we'll switch off all the lights, undress, and get under the covers on the limp air mattress. I'll turn to the all-news station on the radio next to the mattress. And then—amid the endless litany of fires, explosions, murders, and natural disasters—we'll gradually drift into sleep.

Appropriately, the story from which this quotation comes is entitled "Health."²

Much of the humor in Krist's stories arises out of a cruel understanding that if New Jersey, the Garden State, ever did resemble an American Eden, all is not as it should be there today. In fact, the lives Krist depicts are full of disaster—of divorce and infidelity, of mothers who complain that pregnancy hurts their bowling, of grandmothers ready to be abandoned to nursing homes, of estrangement and isolation, of missing or indifferent parents, and of monumental loneliness. It's hard to judge just what an outsider might expect of New Jersey—perhaps some particular blend of class and ethnic incongruities, industrial (and medical) waste, unusual urban and suburban settings and customs, and some number of false pretensions and failures of taste and decorum. Most of these Krist has managed to supply, along with some updating of older expectations to bring them into the 1980s. His characters live among maroon leather chairs, white marble tables, black ceramic lamps, and Betty Boop earmuffs. They eat at Clams Casino. They would take up jogging, but their knee is their Achilles' heel.

¹ *THE GARDEN STATE*, by Gary Krist. Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich. \$16.95.

² The stories "Health" and "Ty and Janet" in this collection originally appeared in *The Hudson Review*.

In one story the narrator's mother (an aggressive, blowsy realtor), his jealous father, his equally jealous stepfather (an immigrant mechanic from Czechoslovakia who has changed his name to Steve Green), and his girlfriend's mother's first husband's brother (a gay man with a nosy Chihuahua named Dan) all live together in the same Teaneck suburb. In another a teen-age writer discovers a vocation for composing eulogies for a list of the dead whose names are the rival of any who ever attended one of Jay Gatsby's parties: "Mr. Roland Ingbader. Mrs. Millicent Pax. Ella and Dorothy Dinkel. . . . Amanda Prickett. Mr. Stanislaw Cheers." In yet another, the narrator meets his lover Ilona—a "semirepresentational expressionist" or "mud" painter from east Tennessee—over a game of pinochle on the eve of his mother's bypass operation. Amid the hilarity, one thing stands out: this is not the state which inspired William Carlos Williams' *Paterson*. Something in New Jersey has gone wrong.

Such a world, as they say, takes getting used to. Appropriately, therefore, the stories in this volume are stories of initiation. All are about young people, all of them innocent—innocent at least of the kind of judgment, tolerance, and wisdom it takes to survive humanely in such an environment—until experience catches up with them. The lessons, on the other hand, which experience teaches may have to do with accepting divorce or a parent's infidelity or the manner in which one's own judgment gets seduced by the available daydream only to awaken later on. In "Housesitting," for instance, a graduate student spends the summer in her professor's house in Princeton. For her the setting is idyllic. She has just lost her boyfriend, and she is lulled into an affair with the professor's son who shows up unexpectedly and becomes part of her illusion. Her awakening comes in a note from the boy: "Am late for the 7:55. Sorry about leaving. . . . Thanks for EVERYTHING." Attached is a P.S. that the parents will be returning soon and that she must leave.

"Housesitting" is unusual in being the only story in the volume told in the third person and more available for an objective consideration as a result. The remainder are all stories in which the characters, as it were, speak for themselves, and the manner of their speech reflects their degree of self-awareness. Striking in this respect is the manner in which several of Krist's protagonists seem continually to be explaining themselves to the reader as if the latter were some kind of caseworker: we exist in an age of counselors and counseling after all. In "Ty and Janet," for example, Ty explains his and Janet's breakup in the following manner:

The baby was what did it. I think without Benjamin we could've, I don't know. Done it. Benjamin. I remember standing over his crib. . . . I'm standing there, looking down at him, you know, when you're supposed to be getting all those warm paternal feelings? Well, all I can think is: "What the fuck is it with you? Where do you

hurt, for God's sake?" Then, all of a sudden, his mouth goes, like he's sucking Janet's tit, up down up down, like he's saying something. Hey, Dad. Fuck off.

Ty seems trapped by his own judgments, and he even has the immediate, obligatory cliché to sum all this up. "That's the thing about babies," he says. "They look like the bait, but they're really the trap."

In the story entitled "Evidence," an even less self-understanding narrator undertakes a long description of his possessions as if in an attempt to certify his worth: "I've got a Comet sailboat, a rowboat, a canoe, a Ford Fiesta, and Eleanor's old collection of Dresden china in a walnut cabinet in the living room. In five years the mortgage on the house will be paid," etc. All of this, however, seems wildly irrelevant to the tale he is in the process of telling about the new neighbors who have moved in next door. Only later, after he actually contributes to a violent blow-up in his neighbors' family, do we begin to understand that the narrator's self-justifications are the reflection of a pathological personality which only fully emerges on the story's last page.

Several stories describe the emergence into adult life of adolescent boys, two of them specifically boys who discover they have the talent to become writers. In "The Canonization," a bright young man writes a school paper on Donne's poem with the same name which becomes a means through which he gains understanding about his grandmother's old age. "Since handing in the paper," he says, "I've been reading some of the other John Donne poems in the textbook. They're very good—hard, but good. It gets me to thinking: maybe I'll be a poet when I grow up. I could write love poems like Donne. Like my grandmother, too." In "How I Learned to Raise the Dead of Bergen County," the narrator describes the elation, the increased self-assurance and appetite for food and sex, that comes from giving the dead life through his eulogies when even their families have ceased to care for them: "My life was full of people, and getting fuller by the day, with each new eulogy I wrote. I was writing, creating, repopulating the earth." In this story, Krist seems to betray in his narrator some of the joy in creation that attends his own work.

It seems to me that Krist avoids many of the pitfalls that plague other young writers. His stories are spare, but they are not minimalist, and what they give away in terms of the more mannered surrealism of other contemporary writers, they regain in warmth and humanity. With other contemporary regionalist writers (Bobbie Ann Mason and Michael Martone spring to mind), Krist seems to share a troubled sense of how contemporary life homogenizes us all and deprives sections of the country of those very qualities which would make them regionally distinctive. At the same time, his characters retain hope and judgment and the chance for adaptation and growth even under the pressures these forces exert.

If I have a complaint, it is that the experience of New Jersey

presented in this book is a pretty selective one, limited to urban (though not inner-city) and suburban lives of decently educated, though often slightly deranged individuals living in places like Teaneck, Hackensack, or elsewhere in Bergen County. These characters are certainly neither yuppies nor the poor, and they do present a fairly consistent demeanor, but the range of experience they represent is a fairly limited one. Only once or twice does the setting stray to Princeton (where Krist was educated). Nor do any rural settings figure in the stories significantly at all. So much is made—in the title and on the dust jacket—of this as a New Jersey collection, a misplaced emphasis in my estimation, that readers may expect a more complete picture than they will actually receive. But Krist's art—literate, humane—doesn't really need New Jersey as a reference point. At the level at which it works best, it transcends boundaries of time and setting and speaks to the little bit of a garden state we all carry around within us.

ANTHONY STORR

Dreams and Creativity

THE DREAM IS ONE OF THE MOST INTERESTING of all mental phenomena. It can be demonstrated that all human beings dream, even if they are unable to remember doing so; and there is also evidence to suggest that dreaming occurs in other animals. Yet the function of dreams is still an unsolved problem. Since Freud, the territory of dreams has chiefly been the preserve of psychiatrists and psychoanalysts. It is therefore refreshing to welcome a study of dreams by an academic from the University of California at Santa Barbara who is not a psychiatrist.¹ Since dreams are so often dramatic vignettes, it is particularly appropriate that Bert O. States should be a Professor of Dramatic Art.

No writer on dreams can afford to neglect Freud, whose book *The Interpretation of Dreams* was published in 1899. Freud rescued the dream from the obscurity of superstition, and converted it into a subject worthy of scientific scrutiny. He himself believed that *The Interpretation of Dreams* enshrined his most important contribution to psychology, and, in 1931, wrote: "It contains, even according to my present-day judgement, the most valuable of all the discoveries it has been my good fortune to make. Insight such as this falls to one's lot but once in a lifetime."²

Freud's mature theory of dreams stated that, with very few exceptions, dreams were disguised, hallucinatory fulfilments of repressed wishes. He also affirmed that dreams not only represented current wishes, but were also invariably expressions of wish fulfilments dating from early childhood. Because such wishes were usually unacceptable and potentially disturbing, they were censored and disguised. Hence, dreams spoke in an obscure language which required psychoanalytic interpretation if they were to be properly understood. Freud, as usual totally convinced that he was right, was incredibly ingenious at interpreting dreams in ways that fitted his theory. Even so, only a very few fundamentalist Freudians support Freud's theory of dreams in its original form. It is ironic, but not unprecedented, that a man of genius should misjudge which of his contributions is likely to survive.

States, in common with most modern critics, does not accept the main tenets of Freud's theory. Although dreams are not couched in

¹ THE RHETORIC OF DREAMS, by Bert O. States. Cornell University Press. \$22.50.

² Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Standard Edition (London, 1958), Vol. IV, p. xxxii.

the language of everyday speech, there is no evidence that all dreams are concealing something unacceptable, or that they invariably represent unfulfilled wishes, though some may do so. So why are dreams presented in such an obscure fashion?

States agrees that the dream is "not a repressive mechanism," and goes on to affirm, more controversially, that the dream "is not a form of language." "The dream does not speak, it thinks." And the way in which the dream "thinks" is prior to language. Reverting to the "tropes" of rhetoric, States ingeniously suggests that the four tropes, metonymy, synecdoche, metaphor, and irony explain what Freud called the "dream-work," indeed, *are* the dream-work. For is it not true that metonymy and synecdoche are equivalent to Freud's "condensation"; that metaphor is a form of "displacement"; and that irony implies "contradiction"? Although Freud's theory of disguised wish fulfilment is discarded, his account of the dream-work is rehabilitated in a new and fruitful fashion.

States says that the dream "manifests strategies of thought that if traced upward into language would eventuate in the master tropes" (of rhetoric). "So dreams are a kind of proto-rhetoric, *not yet* a language." I imagine that most people are aware that there are mental activities which are precursors of both thought and language, but which cannot be easily grasped or described because language is the only means by which we can grasp or describe such things. As States puts it, "The problem in writing about the dream is that there is no ready language for converting its mechanism into descriptive discourse." I am reminded of Einstein's attempt to define thinking.

What, precisely, is thinking? When at the reception of sense-impressions, memory pictures emerge, this is not yet "thinking." When, however, a certain picture turns up in many such series, then—precisely through such return—it becomes an ordering element for such series in that it connects series which in themselves are unconnected. Such an element becomes an instrument, a concept. I think that the transition from free association or "dreaming" to thinking is characterized by the more or less dominating role which the "concept" plays in it. It is by no means necessary that a concept must be connected with a sensorily cognizable and reproducible sign (word); but when this is the case thinking becomes by means of that fact communicable.³

Although States does not refer to Einstein, he does refer to Lacan, who anticipated States's remarks about dreams and rhetoric in his report to the Rome Congress of 1953. Lacan said:

³ Quoted in *Albert Einstein: Philosopher-Scientist*, ed. by Paul Arthur Schilpp (Evanston, Ill.: Library of Living Philosophers, 1949), pp. 7–8.

The important part begins with the translation of the text, the important part that Freud tells us is given in the elaboration of the dream—that is to say, in its rhetoric. Ellipsis and pleonasm, hyperbaton or syllepsis, regression, repetition, apposition—these are the syntactical displacements; metaphor, catachresis, autonomasis, allegory, metonymy, and synecdoche—these are the semantic condensations in which Freud teaches us to read the intentions—ostentatious or demonstrative, dissimulating or persuasive, retaliatory or seductive—out of which the subject modulates his oneiric discourse.⁴

States may owe more to Lacan than he acknowledges or perhaps realizes; but it appears that he would take issue with Lacan's most famous remark: "The unconscious is structured like a language." For States specifically writes that he disagrees with the French Freudians "who have long since implanted metaphor and metonymy in the unconscious." If metaphor and metonymy are *not* in the unconscious, how is it that the dream makes use of them? We are in an area which almost defies rational discussion, since we are trying to describe in words mental functions which are pre-verbal as well as unconscious.

However, we may surely accept States's repudiation of "the unconscious" as a separate part of the mind split off by repression. Judging by introspection, it seems to me that something equivalent to dreaming is going on in my mind whether I am awake or asleep. Intimations of this activity occur to me the moment I withdraw my attention from the external world; but they are intimations which are hard to grasp, simply because the mental set needed for recall differs from, and interferes with, the mental set requisite for "dreaming." From his discussion of Charles Rycroft, D.B. Klein and Christopher Evans, I think that States would agree with me.

Most modern students of dreaming would concur in supposing that, when we remember a dream, we are catching a glimpse of some kind of sorting or scanning operation. States refers to Stanley Palombo's excellent book *Dreaming and Memory* (Basic Books, 1978) which combines psychoanalytic theories of dreaming with modern ideas about information processing. Although States mentions Palombo's notion that dreams are concerned with matching the previous day's experience with what is stored in the long-term memory, he underestimates its importance. For does not this idea explain one of the most puzzling features of dreams; that time becomes dislocated, so that past and present often appear inextricably confused? If dreams are concerned with matching past and present, as Palombo suggests, it is natural that episodes from each period of time should appear in a single dream.

⁴ Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits, A Selection* (London, 1977), p. 58.

Jung is briefly mentioned with approval, since States concurs with Jung's remark that dreams "are a part of nature, which harbors no intention to deceive, but expresses something as best it can." But it is a pity that he did not explore Jung's most important suggestion about dreams, which is that they have a compensatory function. Jung thought that the mind, like the body, was a self-regulating system. He believed that dreams often presented an opposite point of view to that consciously held by the dreamer. This was especially so if the consciously-held idea was extreme or one-sided. Although not all dreams can be explained in this way, some certainly can be, with valuable clinical results. Jung's view not only fits with physiological conceptions of how the body functions, but is also compatible with information-processing theories of the dream. Scanning and sorting may well result in modification of previously held beliefs and attitudes, much as conscious reflection may lead to one's changing one's mind. Jung certainly thought that there was a kind of inner divinity which shapes our ends, and which strove to prevent people from straying too far beyond the limits imposed upon them by Nature. But one could equally call such an inner regulator a thermostat of the mind, and suppose that self-regulating dreams are an expression of negative feedback.

States is deeply preoccupied with the dream's relation with creativity. "The roots of art are in the dream. The image of the poet is the high refinement of the dream's capacity to conceive the impossible." But he seems puzzled by the dream's inclination toward order. "In sleep, one would think that a mind free of the involvements of putting one foot before another and reduced to a helpless receptor of sensation would run away with itself and produce a chaos of images, or nothing at all. But this is not the case. In its own terms, the dream is capable of remarkable control of its materials."

Is States still being influenced by Freud's notion of the id as a seething chaos? The commonest way in which dreams order their material is by making them into a story; perhaps an "impossible" or fantastical story, but a story nonetheless. I am not disputing States's contention that metaphor contributes to the dream's "sense of responsible linearity," as he calls it; but simply expressing surprise at his surprise. If dreams are concerned with scanning and sorting, it is natural rather than baffling that they should also be concerned with ordering experience. States does not mention Marion Milner or Anton Ehrenzweig; but reference to the former's *On Not Being Able to Paint* or to the latter's *The Hidden Order of Art* may convince him that ordering material is an involuntary exercise which the mind performs automatically whether it is awake or dreaming.

One of the most significant modifications of Freudian theory advanced by such analysts is the abolition of Freud's division of mental activity into "primary process" and "secondary process." Freud bracketed play, phantasy, and the dream as escapist wish

fulfilment; thus denigrating imaginative activities as primitive or childish. Freud supposed that the mature person employed “secondary process”; that is, rational thought consciously directed toward a given end. It followed from this division that the ordering process so characteristic of man belonged to consciousness, whilst the unconscious remained chaotic, being governed only by the pleasure principle’s demands for immediate satisfaction. In fact, as the neo-Freudians have pointed out, and as creative artists have always known, an ordering process is constantly going on in the mind which is quite independent of conscious ratiocination, and which often solves problems or suggests new approaches which the artist could not have arrived at by deliberation.

In a chapter on “Metaphor,” States quotes Donald Davidson’s remark that “Metaphor is the dream-work of language” and then reverses it by writing: “*Metaphor is the language of dream-work.*” He continues: “By this I mean not that dreaming is an instrument of communication but that the only way the dreaming brain can process experience for any purpose is to speak of it qualitatively by reconstituting it in new forms. The dream is not primarily a mimetic or representational activity; it is a combinatory one.” And the way in which dreams combine things is by means of the tropes of rhetoric which were listed earlier.

But combining things is the root process in creativity. It subsumes what Koestler called “bisociation.” Perhaps this is more obviously the case in scientific, rather than artistic creation, though the concept applies to both. Science progresses by the construction of hypotheses which embrace ever larger wholes; which unite under one umbrella theories which had previously seemed incompatible. Newton discovered laws of motion which applied equally to bodies on the earth and bodies in the heavens by combining elements from the theories of Galileo and Kepler. Newton’s hypothesis of universal gravitation is perhaps the most important example of “bisociation” or combinatory achievement in the history of science. I hope that States will explore scientific, as well as literary, creativity in his next book.

In such a controversial area, everyone will have his own pet theories, his own criticisms, and his own regrets at omissions. But this is a notable addition to the literature on dreams, which no one working on, or interested in, the subject can afford to overlook. *The Rhetoric of Dreams* is particularly valuable because it is cross-disciplinary. I hope it will be widely read by students of literature and the arts as well as by psychiatrists and psychoanalysts.

Collective Nightmares

"CAN THERE BE SUCH A THING as a history of the human imagination?" Derek Jarrett asks in the introduction to his absorbing account of some of the crazier byways of the Victorian age.¹ Setting on one side the political and philosophical thinkers and imaginative writers more commonly invoked to give a picture of the age, Jarrett instead promises a Jungian perspective on the nineteenth century's archetypal myths and fantasies, more fruitful, for his purpose, than the Freudian landscape of the individual unconscious. Though he has limited himself to the English-speaking societies of Britain and America, many of the conclusions he reaches are supported by an earlier book, which he does not cite, and may not be aware of, which explored similar themes in nineteenth-century Germany.²

Jarrett's contention is that the myths of hell and heaven and the Last Judgement which had hitherto been central to Christian belief, were not replaced over the century, as that belief waned, by rational ideas based on the new scientific discoveries. Instead the old myths persisted, but in bizarre forms, as the mainstream of Christian belief was diverted and spent itself in side channels; some which quickly petered out, lost in the sands of indifference, others dangerously deep and narrow. Human nature, according to this theory, abhors a mythic vacuum. "The fact that thousands of people refused to believe that God was real is one side of the coin: the fact that almost as many refused to believe that Sherlock Holmes was fictitious is the other." As Disraeli said in 1864, "Man . . . is a being born to believe . . . the characteristic of the present age is a craving credulity."

Jarrett's title is taken from the inscription on the frontispiece to Goya's *Caprichos*, published in 1799: "The sleep of reason brings forth monsters." Goya depicts himself asleep at his drawing-board; around him hover the creatures of nightmare and witchcraft that haunted his later work. Goya's explanation is: "Imagination" (Jarrett's translation of "fantasia") "deserted by reason begets impossible monsters; united with reason she is the mother of all the arts and the source of their wonders." The nineteenth century, as Jarrett sees it, was the age above all others in which reason slept. Ultimately the monsters

¹ THE SLEEP OF REASON: Fantasy and Reality from the Victorian Age to the First World War, by Derek Jarrett. Harper & Row. \$22.50.

² Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism: the Ariosophists of Austria and Germany 1890–1935*, The Aquarian Press (Wellingborough, England, 1985). Published in the U.S. by Samuel Weiser, Inc. (York Beach, Maine).

unleashed by the ungoverned imagination were to rise up against the very people who had conceived them, coming to birth in the Armageddon of the First World War.

Goya, however, was not making a prediction, but expressing a universal truth about human nature. He was well aware that his own hold on reason was precarious in his later years—the only recognizable portrait in the *Caprichos* is that of the artist himself. But Goya was convinced that his world was equally mad. According to Kenneth Clark, the *Caprichos* are “a savage attack on society and the Church.” The first version of the etching had a different inscription beginning, “Ydioma Universal”—the universal idiom. So Goya’s nightmares are collective eighteenth-century nightmares, and our vexed nightmares too; they certainly foreshadow Yeats’s rough beast slouching towards Bethlehem. They are the “Witches and other night-fears” of Lamb’s essay of the 1820s, in which, in a striking anticipation of Jung, they are described as “transcripts, types—the archetypes are in us, and eternal.” In what sense, then, can Jarrett claim the Victorian age as one which has a less than common hold on reason?

Though Jarrett concedes that the eighteenth century was only the “supposed” Age of Reason, he sees a qualitative difference from previous centuries that made the Victorians exceptionally susceptible to the nightmare monsters of fantasy. “For the first time in human history the invisible was no longer the necessary framework within which truths about the visible world could be discerned.” The turning point is the loss of an external validation of the invisible, when the acceptance of established religion ceased to be universal.

Jarrett’s detailed chronological account of the eighty years from the accession of Queen Victoria to the end of the First World War defends this point of view with wit and skill. He shows how the idea of God fragmented into various forms of modish pantheism; how heaven became a search for evidence of individual survival after death, often through spiritualism; how visions of hell and divine punishment became an obsession with torture and physical and mental suffering; how the belief in the resurrection of the body enshrined in the Creed was distorted to a fashion for vampire stories, and how the Day of Judgement ceased to be a divine, far-off event, and came to be foreseen in every natural disaster, in every threat of war.

Jarrett’s reading is eclectic, ranging from statistics on “whipping brothels” to those on public libraries. He quotes the confident belief of one Guillaume Figuiet that “solar radiation is maintained by the continuous unbroken succession of souls in the sun,” and also the impressive anticipation of Freud by Frances Power Cobbe, better-known as an anti-vivisectionist, voiced in her theory of “Unconscious Cerebration.” Miss Cobbe realized in 1870 what Freud was to acknowledge more than twenty years later: the importance of dreams and fantasy in revealing the unconscious self. “The small share occupied by the Moral Law in the dream world is a significant fact,” she wrote. “Our dream-selves, like the Undines of German folk-lore,

have no Souls, no Responsibility, and no Hereafter." But, unlike Freud, she believed that the conscious mind differed in kind from the unconscious, and had the ability, indeed the duty, through the exercise of moral will, to rule and subjugate the dream demons. "It was as well," comments Jarrett, "she did not live to see Sigmund Freud turn her riders into steeds and her steeds into riders."

The strong apocalyptic trends within the Christian churches, both in the Evangelical movement, and in the various forms of Revivalist Christianity that were particularly popular in America, expressed beliefs quite as bizarre as those of the heretics the church leaders condemned. Such movements were on the whole dismissed by the educated, but still attracted a surprisingly wide segment of society. The new religion of spiritualism, however, seems to have appealed to the intellectual elite as much as to the simple-minded. Men and women of an otherwise rational cast of mind happily accepted all the pseudo-scientific paraphernalia of the seance. Indian spirit guides were very popular after the publication of *Hiawatha*, ectoplasmic manifestations always welcome. As soon as one medium was exposed as bogus, another would become equally popular. The spiritualists claimed the support of the highest in the land. "It is generally understood that Her Majesty holds constant communion with the spirit of Prince Albert," asserted the *Spiritual Magazine*, in 1864.

Jarrett also measures reactions to natural disasters—fire, flood, famine and pestilence—throughout the century. 1866 was a good year for the apocalyptic prophets, with torrential rains and disastrous floods, and 1878 ran it close. But it was 1881, an obvious gift to the numerologists, that was most confidently predicted as the date of the Second Coming. The year started so cold that there were ice floes in the Thames, and the wolves came out of the forest all over Europe. The summer brought earthquakes and cyclones. And Nietzsche proclaimed, "God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him." But still the end of the world failed to arrive, in spite of the wealth of evidence of God's anger. Reading Jarrett as he charts, year by year, freezing summers and unseasonably warm winters, crop failures, gales, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, tidal waves, epidemics, we may begin to wonder whether our current obsession with the ozone layer, the "greenhouse effect," and all the other current ecological disasters may not, after all, be a twentieth-century displacement of an archetypal myth. The new disease of cholera was seized on by the nineteenth-century prophets of doom, and one famous divine, Dr. Cumming, even dragged in phylloxera to help prove the imminence of apocalypse. What would they not have done with AIDS?

Derek Jarrett devotes a considerable amount of space to Dr. Cumming, whose immensely popular lectures and sermons predicted the end of the world more than once. When overtaken by events, Dr. Cumming simply shifted his dates. Elizabeth Barrett Browning's dislike of him is mentioned, and an attack on him by Harcourt Bland, a comedian at the Theatre Royal, Glasgow, both of 1855. But Jarrett sometimes seems to

be conducting a deliberate exercise in obliquity, a paper chase for the reader of Victorian fiction. The unvoiced parallels between past and present, life and art, left for the reader to perceive, were for me one of his book's chief pleasures. It is characteristic of his teasing method that he does not mention that Dr. Cumming is chiefly remembered now because of a brilliant analysis and demolition of his intellectual dishonesty, his lack of scholarship, and the essential ephemerality of his writing in the *Westminster Review* for October 1855. "Dr. Cumming's delight" wrote the anonymous reviewer, "in advertising the premillennial Advent, is simply the transportation of political passions on to a so-called religious platform; it is the anticipation of the triumph of 'our party,' accomplished by our principal men being 'sent for' into the clouds." The writer was Marian Evans, soon to become famous as George Eliot. Elsewhere, as an example of irrational belief, Jarrett gives us the fascinating information that there was a steady sale for cauls, as a preservative against drowning, as late as 1847, the year after the founding of the rationalist newspaper *The Reasoner*. The *Times* advertised at least one a fortnight. At once one remembers the opening chapter of *David Copperfield*: "I was born with a caul, which was advertised for sale, in the newspapers, at the low price of fifteen guineas." David's caul fails to find a purchaser, and is finally acquired in a raffle by an old lady who "was never drowned, but died triumphantly in bed, at ninety-two" never having been on the water in her life. The powerful superstition Jarrett takes as his example was currently being undermined, quite deliberately, by the mockery of the most widely-read novelist of the day. Jarrett's careful research puts Dickens' joke in context.

Derek Jarrett has his reasons for mentioning Dickens only in passing, and George Eliot, Thackeray and Trollope, not at all. Yet all these novelists repeatedly wrote and spoke of themselves as "weekday preachers" in an age when the Church had lost direction and authority. Their intention was to provide entertainment *and* moral guidance; fantasy *and* reason. Dickens founded *Household Words* in order to provide a low-priced alternative to the trashy magazines that peddled crime and sensation. It was an instant and continuing success. George Eliot's attempt to create a moral framework for her fiction relying on humanism rather than Christianity is well-known. For Goya's equation contains, of course, another side. Reason without imagination, it suggests, is as barren and limiting as imagination divorced from reason is distorting and dangerous. It was a danger the nineteenth-century novelists Jarrett ignores were sharply aware of: Dickens wrote *Hard Times* specifically to address the theme. The horrors Jarrett charts so graphically were often caused as much by the sleep of imagination as the sleep of reason. It is the divorce of the twin capacities of the human mind, the failure to recognize the potency of both Apollo and Dionysos that brings forth the impossible monsters in any age.

Jarrett would claim that the influence of these novelists has been overestimated. Yet it was not negligible. Jarrett discusses the negative

and depressed reactions of Tennyson and Arnold to the new apprehension of the universe, seeing them as indicators of public mood: but the mass of the population were looking for a more vigorous and optimistic lead, at least in the first half of the period, and the novelists, well aware of the fictional rubbish that was on offer, the "penny dreadfuls," attempted to provide something better.

In discussing the effect of fiction on the mythmaking collective unconscious, Jarrett concentrates instead on vampire stories, and other shockers about the "undead," and the adventure fiction of the 1870s. Stevenson, Rider Haggard, Hall Caine, all encouraged an appetite for violence that was in harmony with the Empire-building subjugation of lesser breeds without the law. Some of the most sadistic of the adventure stories were in fact written for children, by writers such as R. M. Ballantyne and G. A. Henty. Jarrett sees the enthusiasm for this fiction as a new form of religion, whose churches were the newly founded public libraries. "Ten years of cheap reading," wrote Shaw in 1901, "have changed the English from the most solid nation in Europe to the most theatrical and hysterical." Yet though most of the books borrowed from the public libraries were fiction, this was nothing new. Fiction, whether in the expensive form of the three-volume novel produced for the circulating libraries, or the cheaper editions that, in the case of a popular novelist such as Dickens or Wilkie Collins, rapidly followed, or, most accessible of all, the publication in "numbers" or in magazines, had always been the mainstay of writers and publishers throughout the Victorian age. The public in the 1880s and 1890s might be reading Rider Haggard and Hall Caine, but they were still reading Dickens too.

The Sleep of Reason, immensely enjoyable though it is, finally failed to convince me of its central thesis. Its collection of marvellous anecdotes about the infinite capacity of the human mind for believing six impossible things before breakfast falls short of constituting a map of the collective unconscious. Nor did Jarrett persuade me that the breakdown of orthodox religious belief from a norm of near-universal acceptance was as clear-cut as his theory would suggest. I suspect that a mixture of superstition and scepticism has always constituted the "religion" of the vast majority in the West, and still does so today. Churchgoing in England (though not in America) has declined almost to vanishing point. Yet the disastrous fire that destroyed much of York Minster was attributed by many to God's anger at the consecration there of the heterodox Bishop of Durham. Eccentric systems of belief, from alchemy and witchcraft to the Moonies or the Maharishi, have always had an eager and uncritical following. A recent survey revealed that 58% of all Americans still believe in hell, whatever they may mean by that term. A group of young people in Skegness, Lincolnshire, spent this Easter jogging for Jesus. Religious or philosophical purists may deplore all this; but it is the creeds that cannot tolerate deviants that encourage Armageddon, not the polytheistic perversity of Western society.

DENNIS SAMPSON

Poetry Chronicle

PRIMO LEVI WAS DEPORTED TO AUSCHWITZ in 1944, when he was a child. The poetry he wrote over the next four decades has been collected into a slender volume¹ translated by Ruth Feldman and Brian Swann; and it's a stunner. The voice in poem after poem is uncompromisingly moral and ashamed, and finds its equal in other testaments to human cruelty, *Night* by Elie Weisel and Jacobo Timmerman's *Prisoner Without a Name, Cell Without a Number*. Levi does not dwell extensively on the Holocaust, as you might expect; instead, he offers up a horrifying vision of one who has stared into the center of evil and been changed. Godless, because God refused to intervene, faithless for the same reason, Levi in these poems is a modern day Diogenes wandering over the "cursed earth" searching for "something to believe in." Repeated pleas for the serenity of death are not surprising, since we know that Primo Levi died in 1987, a suicide. In "Epitaph" he beseeches,

Passer-by, I ask no pardon of you or any other,
No prayer or lament, no special remembrance.
Only one thing I beg: that this peace of mine endure,
That heat and cold succeed each other endlessly above me,
Without fresh blood filtering through clods
To reach me with its deadly warmth,
Waking to new pain these bones long turned to stone.

Pascal deemed man heroic because of his meagreness, and Levi renders his creatures with dignity and never condescends. The girl immortalized in lava in "The Girl-Child of Pompei" ("Clutching your mother convulsively / As though, when the noon sky turned black, / You wanted to re-enter her") leads to a reflection on Anne Frank, "The Dutch girl imprisoned by four walls / Who wrote of her youth without tomorrows" and then to "the Hiroshima schoolgirl, / A shadow printed on a wall by the light of a thousand suns." It concludes with an admonition to "the powerful of the earth":

¹ COLLECTED POEMS, by Primo Levi. Trans. by Ruth Feldman and Brian Swann. Faber and Faber. \$12.95.

Sad secret guardians of final thunder,
 The torments heaven sends us are enough.
 Before your finger presses down, stop and consider.

What are we to make of such a vision, where God is depicted as that “spasm” from which “everything was born” and the narrator in “11 February 1946” considers “the rash blasphemy / That the world was God’s error”? Levi’s outrage, his resignation to man’s pitiful condition and fear of the future are manifested in startling ways; rarely does he address directly the atrocities committed by the Nazis. “For Adolf Eichmann” is an exception, a harrowing denunciation of the man professed to have said he would “leap happily into the grave” knowing he was responsible for the death of six million Jews.

Oh son of death, we do not wish you death.
 May you live longer than anyone lived.
 May you live sleepless five million nights,
 And may you be visited each night by the suffering
 of everyone you saw . . .

One moves with care through this book. Graced with an ironic humor that nearly saves him, Levi speaks authoritatively on the condition of the contemporary spirit and what he has to say is not reassuring: “And all of us human seed, we live and die for nothing, / The skies perpetually revolve in vain” (“The Black Stars”). There is a growing exhaustion to his voice too, as if this pilgrimage begun at Auschwitz were simply too purposeless to endure, too inane. “How long will these limbs continue to obey me?” he exclaims in “Toward the Valley.” And in “The Elephant,” one of several poems employing the persona of an animal, he adds, “I was tired of marching and heavy loads,” ending with “I’ve hurled my useless dying trumpeting / At these peaks, / Livid in the sunset: ‘Absurd, absurd.’” Unprotected, envious of those who do not share his knowledge, his only source of relief is identified in the final poem, “Memorandum Book”:

In such a night as this,
 A poet strains his bow, searching for a word
 That can contain the typhoon’s force,
 The secrets of blood and seed.

Imagine Dante alone in hell, or Job without his heavenly visitation, and you have the spirit of Primo Levi in these poems—deprived of all anodynes, yet capable of empathy for everyone, “Since,” as he says in “The Girl-Child of Pompei,” “everyone’s anguish is our own.”

Baudelaire said that Chopin’s music was “like a bird of bright plumage fluttering over the horrors of the abyss,” and this is an appropriate image for anyone wanting to understand the poetry of

Georg Trakl. Asked why he never entered a monastery, that mysterious early twentieth-century German poet responded that he was a Protestant and had “no right to depart from hell.” Does this give you an idea what to expect from this writer? *Song of the West*,² translated by Robert Firmage, is marked by lyrical grace, phantasmagoric images that beg to give shape to the spiritual in which Trakl tried permanently to live. References relating particularly to the Passion and Resurrection appear and disappear: “Golden blooms the tree of grace,” “In starlight the cross looms dark,” “. . . his head bows down in the darkness of the olive tree.” Trakl is known too for his repetitive use of the same words: *countenance, blue, chamber, dark, stars, olive tree, shepherd*, among others. This serves the same purpose that it did in the work of one who recognized Trakl as a kindred spirit early on, James Wright. For both poets there was, at the center of everything, something that could never consent to description.

Obsessed with corruption, with sin, the ethereal soul of these lyrics recoils at the sight of the human city:

Where, cold and evil,
A rotting generation dwells
And prepares a dark future
For white grandchildren.
“Evening”

One can also hear Blake’s excoriation of industrial London in these lines:

Whore, who bears a dead infant in icy shudders.
God’s wrath whips raging the brow of the possessed,
Crimson plague, hunger, which shatters green eyes.
Oh the hideous laughter of gold.
“To Those Grown Mute”

The thought of heaven is not heaven, although it may fill one with elation. Poor, preposterously ill-at-ease with other people, Trakl’s life is not much more than one long lyrical cry, “I have been touched by the hand of God.” Unlike the ecstasy of Saint Theresa, Trakl’s is the grief of the visionary caught between the corporeal and spiritual: his poems seem inadvertently original—not the product of a man seeking “liberation of the poetic figure,” as Rilke was quoted as saying.

What young poet of our time might have the capacity to say of prayer, “The graves of the dead / Open at your feet / When you lay your brow in your silver hands”? Would Trakl have said of God’s

² SONG OF THE WEST, by Georg Trakl. Trans. by Robert Firmage. North Point Press. \$9.95p.

considerable promise what Levi did of Buna-Monowitz, "it must be experienced to be understood"? Rarely do his hallucinogenic visions coalesce—the idiot savant at the piano playing a combination of Stravinsky and Scriabin. His methodology is that of the Christian mystic, harking back repeatedly to the mystery of the Crucifixion, Trakl's paradigm for everything.

Robert Firmage has captured well the foreboding tone of these apocalyptic poems without sacrificing the naiveté. While his introduction does not do much to untangle the complexities, that won't matter to those willing to give Trakl the benefit of the doubt, going into his poems with an open mind to find out what is there.

Numerous allusions, a proclivity for eclectic phrasing and odd rhetorical stances characterize James Merrill's new book.³ One moves from poem to poem with growing dismay, realizing that this is the work of someone thoroughly dedicated to his craft and yet maddeningly unable to render experience. There is an air of contrivance to all his worst poems, an overingenuity of language that, rather than engage the reader, serves to keep him safely at bay. The following is fairly typical:

From his black square Orion cuts degrees
Of adamant whereby the here-below
Church, palace, obelisk,
Boarded-up flower stall, *our* square, all grow
Solider, and with each whispered nothing,
Each fading cry, more "eternal,"
While the cars, the people—? Just a human smear
About the Bocca della Verità . . .
"Walks in Rome"

Merrill also has the bad habit of interrupting himself with questions designed to propel the narrative forward: "Poor laureate?" "Pure whim?" "Come true?" "Eye-shadow on an old maid?" "Only a dream?" "The vignette touches you?" Proust and James left no doubt about the validity of their experience among the upper classes; the sheer quantity of their prose attests to the inexhaustible theme of the human condition, whether it embrace the connoisseur of fine cuisine or the wino. Merrill, on the other hand, is afflicted with grandiose gestures and an achingly shallow interpretation of the events that comprise a life. "Serenade" begins promisingly, with a reverie over a letter,

Here's your letter the old portable
Pecked out so passionately as to crack

³ THE INNER ROOM, by James Merrill. Alfred A. Knopf. \$8.95p.

The larynx. I too dream of "times
We'll share." Across the river: MUTUAL LIFE.

then degenerates into wordiness and pedantic double talk, so much so that one is tempted to begin editing:

Flush of a skyline. Owning up to past
Decorum, present insatiety,
Let corporate proceedings one by one
Be abstracted to mauve onionskin. . . .

What James Dickey said of Merrill several years ago in *Babel to Byzantium* is applicable today, only more so, and others have reiterated his deficiencies again and again. Nevertheless, there are good poems in *The Inner Room*, of which the long prose poem, "Points of Departure," is probably the best—a journalistic account of a journey to Japan that focuses on the individual's fear of death. Coupled with his persistent fidelity to traditional prosody, the conversational ease that Merrill has tried to adopt from Elizabeth Bishop makes much of his new work sound like the poetry of those well-meaning people in the magazine *The Writer*, who believe rhyme, alliteration, and meter are enough for the construction of a poem.

Two first books by writers in their thirties, David Rivard and Will Wells, exemplify the concerns the contemporary American poet has always had, especially as they pertain to the delicate architecture of the family. In *Torque*⁴ Rivard looks back with an edge of bitterness at his brother and working-class father, and finds them unapproachable even in retrospect: "Whatever my father & I have in common / is mostly silence. And anger that keeps twisting / back on itself . . ." ("Fall River"). In the same poem he later confesses that he and his father share

. . . a love so awkward
that it explains, with unreasoning perfection,
why we still can't speak
easily to each other, about the past or anything else . . .

Rivard's subjects are varied and he has a natural ability to speak the poem into being, poetic gimmicks and tricks dispensed with. Some may be put off not only by his occasional arrogance and presumption of innocence as he discusses others, but by the language of one who can't always quite collar his rage. Still, there is fine writing here and Rivard should be commended:

My life. How much easier to feel that,
and to fall asleep stroking your thigh,

⁴ TORQUE, by David Rivard. University of Pittsburgh Press. \$16.95; \$8.95.

before the sunlight sliced
 through your bedroom windows, come its cold blue distance
 singing like the hammered iron tip of a spear.

“Ariadne”

*Conversing with the Light*⁵ by Will Wells is an achievement by a poet with nearly perfect control and a talent for evoking the past. In four sections, it moves circuitously through childhood and adolescence, from Europe to Ohio, a journey that culminates with him in bed with his son, letting the school bus honk and go on. Good lines abound. In “The Wanderers,” the first poem in the book, the poet at three huddles “in the back seat / mesmerized by the elegy that rubber / intones against the road.” Skipping stones he sees how “Each wing paused before it plunged.” And returning to his childhood home he remembers how “on the porch front” he “huddled / as a boy to watch rain rappel / down a spider’s web, one fly / strung up among the sparkling beads.” None of the poems seem to have been composed to complement the progression from childhood to the present. “Jenny through the Hedge” remembers him being with some friends, all sisterless, and seeing a young girl “swing / naked, wholly taken by this straining” beyond the hedge around her house at dawn, her “nightie, hung so neatly / on a branch.” They watch in awe:

When the pantry light flicked on,
 so did the world. Playing it
 safe, my friends retreated.
 But I lingered, to husband
 the moment. And Jenny swung on,
 as if she knew how much it mattered.

Among other good ones are “A Scholar’s Suicide,” “The Pianist,” “Spooking,” “From the Coronary Care Ward,” and “The Ancient,” a short poem (as most are) that marvels over the miracle of the fetus, the four-year-old son putting his ear to “the conch of” the mother’s “navel, / spellbound by the roll of waves—an eerie ease uneasily recalled.” The husband too is caught up in the drama: “In fumbling reverence, I bend / to the loom of time, the ramifying womb.”

Geraldine C. Little, whose poetry was new to me, distinguishes herself in *A Well-Tuned Harp*⁶ with a loosely formal line and a richness of language that often reminds me of Hopkins. Sections one and two trace her childhood in Ireland, as the daughter of a clergyman, to her life in the New Jersey Pine Barrens. Her struggle is essentially one of faith, the dogma of the church strangely inapplicable to her and yet reluctant to release its grip. One poem, “Slippage,” contrasts the

⁵ *CONVERSING WITH THE LIGHT*, by Will Wells. Anhinga Press. \$7.50p.

⁶ *A WELL-TUNED HARP*, by Geraldine C. Little. Saturday Press. \$7.00p.

poet's preference for divinity in the "silken wing / of a bee at a rose" or "light from a star born / before Christ clutched it" to her parents' (and Simone Weil's) seeing Christ in "the high throne of His sky":

. . . Simone, Mother,
 Father, how did you manage
 the cosmic leap

I long for when I am sucked,
 sometimes, into the black hole
 beyond cells and senses?

Little's uncanny ability to bring disparate elements together (out of whose union extraordinary insights often evolve), marks her as unique, a pleasant surprise to me. "Each shadow / reminds you of something by Mahler," she observes in "Birches: Petersborough, New Hampshire," a poem that begins with a nod to Frost then assumes an authority all its own:

Look at the bark mottled with music
 from another opus, an opera Chekov
 might have considered writing, full

of humanity's everyday striving for cherries
 to sweeten the mundane meal . . .

This is a beautiful book, and bears comparison to the finest poetry of our time. Its innovations are meditative, therefore easily overlooked by readers eager for raw realism or the stylistic flourishes that find favor with exegetes and critics. "Tour of Seegrotte Caves near Vienna" follows the descent of "forty eager foreigners" into "the mouth, indifferent hole in earth's face," where "shadows slither on dripping walls." The tour guide informs them this is where "Germans manufactured / planes using labor / from concentration camps." For her, the situation is irrevocably altered:

In my head,
 cries, moans, wails, frozen
 behind faces sculptured
 for survival.

We surface to spring light
 soft as prayers
 they dared not voice.

Unaffected, with a mythologist's mind, Little has a big heart and writes what we rarely find: the poetry of a grown woman.

JAMES FINN COTTER

Poetry Travels

THIS POETRY CHRONICLE TURNS OUT TO BE A POETRY TRAVELOGUE. Poets appear to be hitting the road for all parts of the world and writing accounts of their travels. There are also the homebodies for whom, like Emily Dickinson, "to shut our eyes is Travel." Outward or inward bound, poets are describing the "realms of gold" discovered on their real and imaginary journeys.

In *The Creole Mephistopheles*,¹ his sixth book of verse, Laurence Lieberman continues the cycle of Caribbean narratives in his previous collection *The Mural of Wakeful Sleep*. Lieberman has developed a very readable narrative style; his free-flowing lines lead the reader right along with him on his travels. The stanzas form ever new patterns, and at each turn of the page as at each turn of the corner, a fresh view awaits the eye:

We've hugged coastline
for miles, cruising past
one premiere vista after another.
Winding in slow ascent
over the rise, we reach low coastal summit,
park, and step out to the bluff, steep precipice
overlooking the shore.

These lines, from the long poem "Mayhem and Romance in a Cropduster Fuselage," merge the flow of lines with the slow winding auto trip. Notice the omission of articles and any unnecessary details. Lieberman manages to be economical in his eloquence. In the course of this poem, the poet and his son Isaac, with two teenage native guides Althea and Virginia, drive along the coastline of Dominica, discover a wrecked plane where outlaws take pot shots at them, and become involved in judo contests and races with their two athletic companions. All the time the camera takes pictures of the unfolding events:

We change places,
likewise, behind the camera shutter
and lens—each a portraitist and posed subject,

¹ THE CREOLE MEPHISTOPHELES, by Laurence Lieberman. Charles Scribner's Sons. \$19.95.

by turns, no one of us spared any role in the improvised
charade of the banana field film script caper.

The travelers are tourists, after all, and Lieberman avoids any
maudlin or moralistic attitudinizing. Poverty and misery are every-
where at hand and faithfully recorded in the camera's eye. In "The
Skateboard Throne: An Ode to Citizen Amputees," the poet's daugh-
ter Deborah selects one of the maimed street urchins in a Haiti
marketplace for her model:

How well your eye,
steady on, targeted the one surpassing model
from throngs: in Christophe's soft face, quiet dignity,
pathos and stoic calm
mix; left eye blackened, jawbone swollen purplely,
but his off-center slanted
features are less disfigurement of floggings
(family whip-or-fist blows to spur wage hustle fervor)
than sidewise tilt in gaunt facebones halfway
between a true dark smile
and smirk. You command his faithful moves for no fee
but gay bravos, when you catch prize snapshot—
your eyes' ardor

and sparkle. *Your praise.*

His daughter catches on film the beauty in the features and poses of
the hapless, beaten waif. She is an artist and her father is another,
catching in words the whole moving scene while the wiry rag-garbed
beggar cavorts with delight at the attention he is getting. Other scenes
recorded include a mock beach-burial ceremony in "Blacksand
Graves," a cow's falling into a resort pool in "Swimming Pool
Pastoral," and a raucous ride on a crowded bus in the title poem.
Here, hitchhikers attach themselves to the outside of the van while
more cargo and cages of animals are strapped to the roof. Round and
round the same streets of Jacmel, poet and daughter ride, bumping
along in a Keystone comedy caper. In this collection, Lieberman has
crafted a most entertaining book, unpretentious and full of surprises,
original, funny, serious, eccentric, observant, and passionate. *So it is,*
the Eye, with careless genius, / condenses and transcribes the world.

The voyage inward occupies Donald Hall in his book-length poem
The One Day.² In the fall of 1971, he was compelled for several weeks
to write as if by dictation; other voices took over his brain. One of the
characters was a middle-aged man (the poet's alter ego), another a
woman sculptor. (In the final form of the poem, he speaks in roman

² THE ONE DAY: A Poem in Three Parts, by Donald Hall. Ticknor & Fields. \$16.95.

type and she in italics.) The material was shaped into three parts ("Shrubs Burnt Away," "Four Classic Texts: Prophecy, Pastoral, History, Eclogue," and "To Build a House") written in ten-line stanzas. Hall travels into his characters' minds and discovers oneness in human experience. He summons and sums up the voices speaking within him:

(Who is it that sets these words on blue-lined paper?
It is the old man in the room of bumpy wallpaper.
It is the girl who sits on her drunken mother's lap
or carries her grandmother's eggs. It is the boy who reads
the complete works of Edgar Allan Poe. It is the middle-
aged man motionless in a yellow chair, unable to read,
daydreaming the house of dying: The colony takes comfort
in building this house which does not exist, because
it does not exist—as I stare at the wrist's knuckle,
idle, without purpose, fixed in a yellow chair.)

The persona returns in the end to the poet himself. The poem, originally to be called "The House of Dying," becomes its own structure of life in the everyday world made transcendent by love and work among natural things. For the poet these things are his home, wife, friends, poetry, and apple orchards:

We age among apples—in dread of icestorm, wet snow
in May, drought, August wind forcing an early drop; wary
of bark-eating deer, of bears that break branches climbing.
From the first orchard to the last is one day and eternity.

The theme of the one day provides one of several motifs that attempt to bring unity to the poem; others are the world as a bed, airplanes, drinking, eating, sex, sleeping, dying, and building. The poem is built on opposites: "We were never alone; / we were always alone." Past and present merge, male and female, individual and community. The central section, which is the most discursive, contains a highly rhetorical jeremiad against the modern world of taxes and drive-in churches, a pastoral parody in the form of a dialogue between a Marc and Phyllis in the kitchen, an account of history that reduces it to terrorist activity, and a version of Virgil's *Fourth Eclogue* that hails the birth of a girl as a new deliverer of creation. Somehow the fragments here do not fit the joists of the poem, except in a willed fashion. The most cogent section is the last where the theme of the one day takes over:

The one day recalls us to hills and meadows, to moss,
roses, dirt, apples, and the breathing of timothy—
away from the yellow chair, from blue smoke and daydream.

But even here the preacher sounds off with warnings: "Leave behind manila envelopes! Leave dark suits behind, / boarding passes, and soufflés at the chancellor's house!" This kind of rant is silly and drags down the high level of much of the poem. Its truth lies in its evocation of ordinary life: "Here, among the thirty thousand days of a long life, / a single day stands still." The poet concludes: "The one day stands unmoving in sun and shadow."

Carolyn Kizer has moved around the globe and *Carrying Over*,³ her collection of translations from six languages, is there to prove it. From the classical Chinese of Tu Fu, the modern Mandarin of Shu Ting, the Urdu of Faiz Ahmed Faiz, the Yiddish of Rachel H. Korn, to the Macedonian (Yugoslavia) of Bogomil Gjuzel and the French of the African poet Edouard Maunick, she gathers an impressive anthology of works little known to English speakers. Tu Fu, the best known among these poets, is represented by poems not usually found in other collections. The style and themes mark the man, but his observations are fresh in Kizer's fine translations:

Spring clouds rest on the walls of the Royal Park.
Dusk mutes the passionate coloring of blossoms.
Enclosed by the forest, in the River Pavilion,
I look at painted petals, dark from rain.

"Rain There"

Besides the keen observations of nature, the drinking songs also reappear in a new guise, as in the opening of "I Go Too":

Each day when Court is over, I skip to the pawnshop,
My nice Spring wardrobe underneath my arm.
Bit by bit, I am drinking up my clothes!
At night I return from the riverbank, quite soused.

Such pleasures became more rare in Tu Fu's life which here comprises long hours of writing reports, exile, and a sense of early death. In selections from "Testament," we find the poet, already old at forty, returning from banishment to discover that his son has starved to death and the countryside been reduced to terrible poverty: "I mourn for my poor people, laboring, / Starving all seasons—I rail against their wrongs." Tu Fu vows: "I shall go on pouring out my passionate songs." The Israeli poet Rachel Korn addresses God with passion in "Keep Hidden from Me": "To know myself: Is it not the supreme disaster? / To know Thee, one must sink on trembling knees." And in "Generation" she just as passionately calls on her sixteen-year-old daughter to listen and live in the blood and tradition of her grandmother. Kizer includes in the book extracts from her "Pakistan Journal" which tells of her

³ CARRYING OVER, by Carolyn Kizer. Copper Canyon Press. \$15.00; \$9.00.

meetings with poets and includes an excellent translation of Faiz's "If I Were Certain." She adds three moving poems by Faiz on Bangladesh and poems by N. M. Rashid and M. Safdai Mir. In "Flood at the International Writers' Workshop," the Yugoslavian Gjuzel complains about the poet's struggle to write in a repressive society:

The words refuse to swallow us any longer
Now we have set them quarreling among themselves:
Trying to strangle each other, they bite off their tongues.

In "My Sister's Letter" he sees the breakdown in communication even eroding families. The young Chinese poet Shu Ting celebrates the individual's impulse to love and to voice one's own emotions and insights. Passages in her long poem "The Singing Flower" place power plants and bicycles alongside plum blossoms and riverboats. There is even a Donne-like metaphysical image: "our souls are like a painting on a gallery wall." Finally, Kizer allows us to see her at work as a translator in the bilingual printing of Maunick's "Seven Sides and Seven Syllables." She remains strictly faithful to the original form but shows freedom in using English idioms and in interpreting the ambiguities of the French quatrains. She writes poetry while she translates it, the test of the true poet.

Mary Jo Salter's *Unfinished Painting*,⁴ the 1988 Lamont Poetry Selection, contains the line from Emily Dickinson quoted earlier: "To shut our eyes is Travel." In "The Upper Story" (a neat pun), she describes a visit to Emily's Amherst home where she pictures the poet carried away to Biblical times and places, to eternity in a room: "She'd have held close whatever house / she was born in." Returned from college, Emily came home to stay and to travel:

At twenty-four, moving back
to her birthplace, she'd lived the thought
transposed: To travel, shut the eyes.

Salter knows how to shut her own eyes and travel, back to memories of her mother whose unfinished painting of her son evokes her whole character and unfinished-finished life. In "Dead Letters" the poet recalls her mother's last illness and their trips to the hospital together; both women come alive in the snips of dialogue and events that build up the sequence of poems. Another sequence, "Elegies for Etsuko," recalls a Japanese friend who committed suicide. Their friendship becomes a travelogue of places where they have met: Boston, Kyoto, Rome, and Edinburgh. The poem contains echoes of Auden's tribute to Yeats, but offers personal touches to the elegy genre by its honesty and lack of pretension. "A Grandfather Clock" stands "like an upright coffin" and

⁴ UNFINISHED PAINTING, by Mary Jo Salter. Alfred A. Knopf. \$18.95.

recalls a dead father-in-law, while "Doubles" recalls the same person through the memory of his wife. "Reading Room" precisely evokes the library at Mount Holyoke College, and "Aubade for Brad" humorously enlivens a set poetic piece. In "A Christmas Tree," the poet, coming down to the tree before dawn, remembers herself as a girl:

Dark. Still dark. But morning. Tip-
toeing down the steps, and half-asleep,
I'm halfway there when it dawns

on me why I've come: the tree.
Had I left it on all night, like a green
traffic signal that glows unread?

The papier-maché angel she made at seven becomes an appropriate symbol for herself, hidden away near the back and yet never discarded. Like the sidewalk artist of "Rebirth of Venus," Salter sketches out her themes boldly and simply, enjoying the puns and pulse of language and taking chances with commonplace experiences: a baby that wants attention in the middle of the night ("Emily Wants to Play"), or public disasters ("Chernobyl"). This book of poems reveals someone who has her eyes wide open to the world around her and is well able to describe what she sees.

There is a wonderful moment in "Atlantis," from Michael Van Walleghen's third collection of poems, *Blue Tango*,⁵ when he looks down from an overpass where he has stopped for a red light and sees a street of empty stores:

Little whirlwinds of cellophane,
leaves and paper cups start up—
then a flurry of plastic bags

like jellyfish, go swimming by . . .
as if he were looking down
from inside a submarine perhaps

at some ancient, weed-dense city—
some lost and blear Atlantis
stirring eerily to life again

The eye again transforms the world, but the vision does not end in fantasy. As he drives on, the poet's mind is somewhere else. A giant eel, "the blind indifference / that feeds upon the drowned," upon the poor who are buried in the rubble of our society, stirs him to anger and revulsion. The slums of the real ruined city is what he sees and

⁵ BLUE TANGO, by Michael Van Walleghen. University of Illinois Press. \$8.95p.

not the mythic one. The poet conjures up a lost Atlantis of poverty and unemployment. Like the man who orders a hamburger in another poem, "Hamburger Heaven," and then suffers an epileptic fit, Van Walleghen would have us ponder "the reason for hell" as we encounter it in everyday existence. In "The Foot" the poet recalls himself as a paperboy trying to collect five dollars from a customer who flings the money, in change, out into the snow. He remembers the aches and anxiety of frantically setting up two lanes at once in "Bowling Alley," and the stupidity of his boss in "Hold It." Poems about boyhood offer further trips to hell. His father is a threatening figure in "Peach Isle" and "The Spoiled Child," and a drunken loser in "Meat" and "The Cat's Meow." In "The Age of Reason," the poet describes how at seven he flew in a tiny Piper Cub with a 400-pound alcoholic pilot, his 275-pound father, and a case of beer. A perfect initiation ceremony into the mad male world. "Sneaky" recounts how a neighbor tortures and kills cats, and a prose poem, "The Big Animal," describes how a story he tells his daughter turns into a nightmare. Child abuse, alcoholism, cruelty to animals, and polluted landscapes become part of Van Walleghen's personal world. Echoes of Eliot and Roethke can be found—deliberately—but the voice is the poet's own, forceful, fearless, and concerned.

Maxine Kumin in *Nurture*,⁶ her eighth collection of poetry, describes a return to ancestral Austria in "On Reading an Old Baedeker in Schloss Leopoldskron" and "The Festung, Salzburg." She wonders if she will meet some distant and unrecognized relative there, a survivor of the Anschluss. Survivors populate this poet's work. Caribou, seals, turtles, penguins and other animals struggle to survive. "I am thankful for what's left that's wild," Kumin reflects in "Distance," and lists coydogs, hoot owls, moose, and bears. As she mows with her Tuff-Cut power motor on her birthday, she echoes Hopkins' line: "Long live the weeds and the wilderness yet." In "Homage to Binsey Poplars," she directly alludes to Hopkins' pain at trees being cut down. If she is to be reincarnated, the poet says in "Reviewing the Summer and Winter Calendar of the Next Life," she would prefer to be a barn swallow, grosbeak, or wild turkey, but not a weasel. She is drawn to dramas of animal rescue, Kumin states in the title poem, even if she seems to suffer, as "the critic proclaims, / from an overabundance of maternal genes." This mothering instinct is best represented by "Sleeping with Animals," an account of a birth watch at her New Hampshire farm:

Nightly I choose to keep this covenant
with a wheezing broodmare who, ten days past due,
grunts in her sleep in the vocables
of the vastly pregnant. She lies down

⁶ NURTURE, by Maxine Kumin. Viking. \$17.95.

on sawdust of white pine, its turp smell blending
with the rich scent of ammonia and manure.

A bonding is made between human and animal:

What we say to each other in the cold black
of April, conveyed in a wordless yet perfect
language of touch and tremor, connects
us most surely to the wet cave we all
once burst from gasping, naked or furred,
into our separate species.

The bond between generations is beautifully rendered in "A Game of Monopoly in Chavannes." The game being played with her grandchild in France recalls summers long ago in the real Atlantic City which gave the game its street names. As her grandson loses, he fights back tears, but in reality he is their "sole inheritor":

All that I have is his, under separate cover
and we are the mortgaged nub of all that he has.
Soon enough he will learn, buying long, selling short

his ultimate task is to stay to usher us out.

For no one survives forever. In "Bringing Back the Trumpeter Swan," Kumin notes the irony of conservationists who destroy the balance of nature in trying to preserve one species at the expense of others. In "Thoughts on Saving the Manatee," she concludes that we should "revert to the Catch of the Day / and serve up the last few as steak marinara." But like the parsnip and pudding stone she uncovers in "Turning the Garden in Middle Age," Kumin is herself a survivor. Many of these poems are sure to endure for their integrity of spirit, human warmth, and strength of expression.

In his ninth book of poems, *Secret Citizen*,⁷ Arthur Gregor continues his journey inward on two continents. From his home in Châtillon-sur-Loire, he probes an inner religious world in poetry that reaches eloquent heights of authentic mystical experience. "In Dark's Cover" begins the voyage with tentative affirmations of "a sameness behind a striving, / an urging toward unalterable essence." "The Threshold, or, My Home in Winter" furthers the quest for "the Intangible Near," "the blissful Intangible," and "Immutable Steadiness." None of the abstractions can sustain the nature of his quest and in the third poem, "The Poem of Heaven Within," he abandons them in favor of a person-to-person encounter with the unknown. This eighteen-part

⁷ SECRET CITIZEN, by Arthur Gregor. The Sheep Meadow Press. \$10.95p.

work is firmly grounded in both realms of spirit and matter, and springs from the poet's own brave, tireless, and fervent probing:

—Since nothing that yields itself
to our perception is solid, permanent,
what of that that lures us on, that is
not caught in its appearances? Is it not
in us? Does it not hide in us
without whom appearances would not
appear, would not record, reflect
themselves, their splendor not resonate,
perfection not be recognized,
the ideal they possess, remembered?

Wonderful questions! And Gregor really asks them, truly seeks what “lures us on” in spite of ourselves, our skepticism, lassitude, and indifference. The poet reminds us that we do not have far to look: it is in ourselves or in reading a book in silence, listening to words rising out of the stillness, listening to someone who already has been there where I meets Thou:

He rules there, is not hidden, lives,
nearer than nearness, as though hidden,
in the depth of our being, hangs on our eyes
just as we wake, just as we look upon
his form in the first form before us,
the shape that has risen in our eyes,
space and time having become the shape
that has risen to be recognized,
that has risen to be received.

Gregor never identifies the one who awakens our bliss and remains invisible in us, but it is clearly the risen Christ, the Lord of Chartres and the churches of the Loire valley. The journey to him follows circuitous ways, false starts, and “the rummage of idols and of dreams.” “But the great, the patient source / in us is merciful,” the poet affirms, adding: “It is not asked / that we do any more than we can do.” There will be moments when “the greater force that also exists in you” takes hold of you “like the dance of the dancer, / the creator of what he has created.” In the end, the poet experiences “the essence blessing, loving, enjoying what it is” as he watches a family picnicking by the river. The whole landscape of valley and sky “becomes like a being” whose presence breaks through him so that he is one with each thing: “all of us held in the oneness of the being / that is there, is actually there, in and beyond us. . . .” It is a marvelous close to a magnificent effort. Echoes of Rilke's *Duino Elegies* and Eliot's *Four Quartets* can be found and comparisons made, but on its own merits “The Poem of Heaven Within” joins the august company of great meditative verse.

BENJAMIN GRIFFITH

Naipaul at Large in the South

EARLY IN HIS ACCOUNT OF A LEISURELY, theme-structured journey through the South, V. S. Naipaul quickens one's interest with exotic comparisons.¹ The North Carolina countryside resembles the pampas of Argentina or the llanos of Venezuela; the oak trees of South Carolina have the "shape and spread of the saman trees of Central America." Similarly, since Naipaul's first travel book, *The Middle Passage* (1962), discussed former slave colonies of Latin America, one expects unique insights into racism—his initial theme—as he tours former slave-holding states. He delivers with a striking contrast between the blacks of the Caribbean and the United States. When the British abolished slavery and abandoned the West Indian plantations, Caribbean blacks became the majority, with electoral power. Black Americans, partly liberated at about the same time, found themselves "in a minority in the world's most advanced country, and among the most denuded in that country." The bureaucratic euphemism, "minority," takes on a deeper meaning in this context.

Naipaul's background as a native of Trinidad added zest to one encounter. An elderly Charleston lady related her family's story that "our Burke ancestors from Philadelphia had been left the island of Trinidad." "The whole island?" he inquires. Yes, the lady assured him, but the Burkes drowned in the Windward Passage as they sailed to claim it in May 1795. Naipaul knew that the Spaniards in that period had promised free land to settlers in proportion to slaves owned. "What was news to me," Naipaul writes, "was that Irish people in Philadelphia—who couldn't have had many slaves and wouldn't have qualified for the free land—had thought of going." Applicable here is Flannery O'Connor's comment about her widowed pet swan who fell in love with the birdbath: "Typical Southern sense of reality."

At times the author's studies at Oxford make odd juxtapositions with Deep South customs. When a lady says her Mississippi aunts, as "part of the economy of the place, put on the old costumes and show the houses," Naipaul, musing on his reading of Ben Jonson, calls it "A kind of masque." It is interesting, albeit ludicrous, thus to aggrandize such touristic show business. On a recent Mississippi cruise, featuring visits to ancestral homes and Civil War battlefields, he could have heard a succession of prim old ladies give exaggerated mouthings of

¹ A TURN IN THE SOUTH, by V. S. Naipaul. Alfred A. Knopf: \$18.95; Vintage: \$8.95p.

playful anti-Yankee witticisms. (The other passengers, mostly from California, found it delightful and remarkably true to their cinema-fied picture of Dixie, now “gawn with th’ WEE-innd.”)

At first Naipaul seems bent on eliciting from his interviews every last moldy cliché and chestnut about Dixie, with particular attention to the Scarlett O’Hara Syndrome, and the drama is somewhat heightened by his admitted difficulty in understanding Southern speech. Surely he misunderstood an Atlanta regional novelist’s wild surmise, explaining why Southern girls were trained to eschew displaying intellect and concentrate on charm with which to lure a suitable husband. The Civil War, she argues, left Southern women with houses burned, slaves dispersed, and menfolks slain in a silly, quixotic war. “And these women who had lost everything determined to ensure that their daughters and granddaughters would never again hand their power over to men who would toss it away so lightly.” The Southern belles controlled the men, of course, by guile and charm, their only available weapons. (I can almost hear one of this novelist’s heroines say, “There’s more than one way to skin a cat, Gloria Steinem.”) Parents who wish their daughters to marry well—does this also happen in the Bronx?—leave daughters with bitter, repressed anger, resulting in many “beautiful tragic drunk women in the South, on a country club terrace somewhere.” Rest in peace, Tennessee Williams.

Some inferences stemming from Naipaul’s unusual background ring less than true. Discussing the South’s preoccupation with the past (in a sentence possibly left over from his provocative *Among the Believers: An Islamic Journey*), he writes: “The past as a dream of purity, the past as cause for grief, the past as religion: it is the very prompting of the Shias of Islam to nobility and sacrifice, the dream of the good time of the Prophet and the first four Caliphs, before greed and ambition destroyed the newly saved world. It was the very prompting of the Confederate Memorial in Columbia [S.C.].” What comment would be made by the “good ole Georgia boy” whose pickup truck I recently saw, metal plates of the Confederate and U.S. flags agleam, and bumper sticker emblazoned with blunt commentary on the Ayatollah’s sexual preferences? In Columbia, S.C., Naipaul met a lady immersed in the past who showed him the ante-bellum cathedral and spoke of the burning of the city by Union troops “as though it happened quite recently.” Naipaul had been directed to the Confederate Memorial by Alex Sanders, chief judge of the South Carolina Court of Appeals, who found it astounding that people had erected the memorial in 1879, when food and money were extremely scarce and many concurred with the Confederate veteran whom Sanders once heard remark, in strangely Elizabethan style, “I gotten my arse shot off for other folks’ niggers.” Sanders said that the vast majority (actually 87%) of the Confederate soldiers were not from slave-owning families; they were “fodder for the aristocracy.”

The judge, sanguine in his assessment of the New South's race relations, said of segregation that "people all of a sudden saw that it was wrong. And that is miraculous, for people to say that their own behavior had been morally defective." Conscience, of course, was not always the motive for doing the right thing. As Naipaul reports, when a black IBM executive was denied membership in a Columbia club, Big Blue aborted a proposed plant there. The club then changed its policy and invited some blacks to join. As this review is written, newspapers report the fallout from an ordinance passed by the Atlanta City Council: any club discriminating on the basis of sex, race, or religion could lose its liquor license. Ironically, Council President Marvin S. Arrington, a prominent black citizen and once a waiter in two prestigious Atlanta private clubs, polices the ordinance. When Naipaul spoke with him in the posh bar at the Ritz-Carlton, Arrington's talk was "open and unabashed" about the "difference between today and yesterday, between today, when honor was his, and yesterday, when Atlanta was so segregated that the only place where black people could use the lavatories was the bus station." Similarly optimistic was a black preacher in Florida who told of racial insults in World War II Washington, bringing Naipaul to tears; she continued, "People have changed. And now some of those people wouldn't believe that they were that cruel back there."

When he interviewed the well-spoken, imperially slender Professor Michael Lomax, chairman of the Fulton County Commission, however, Lomax said: "There's not a day, not a moment in my life when I don't have to think about the color of my skin." This was confided as they were being served tea and pastries in white Wedgewood china, writes Naipaul, "laid out for us by someone from the Commission, a white man, young, smiling, happy to serve his elegant chairman." Without reporting how it came to be there, Naipaul mentions seeing in a downtown Atlanta park a seven-ton sculpture entitled *Nelson Mandela Must Be Free to Lead His People and South Africa to Peace and Prosperity*. Such ironies impelled him beyond the theme of racism, which prompted the journey, to "that other South—of order and faith, and music and melancholy," previously unknown to him.

Now Naipaul could make the "great discovery" of his journey: "In no other part of the world had I found people so driven by the idea of good behavior and the religious life." He does not explain that this behavior may have stemmed from the elaborate code of manners practiced by a majority of blacks and whites, letting them live adjacent and alien in relative peace during the decades of segregation. He does offer a diversity of comment on religion. A black minister says that his people "just had a strong religious heritage," even in Africa prior to slavery. A white Mississippi businessman, product of several generations of Baptist faithful, says, "It's religion that gives us purpose in being here," and—like the Puritans of New England—he equates "God-given talent, work, and accountability" with "sound

business practice.” Judge Robert Sugg, of the type of Mississippi hill countryman so admired by Faulkner, found in religion the injunction to be hard-working and self-reliant. As a boy he often stood outside black churches on Sunday nights, listening to the singing. He believes blacks to be “deeply spiritual people.” Now retired, he is committed to teaching illiterate blacks how to read, and he has taken a Southern Baptist workshop in teaching English as a second language. An Episcopal minister in Nashville says that “What is buried in their [Southern Baptists’] psyche is the fear of hell fire and damnation.” A teen-age lay preacher in the fundamentalist Church of Christ praises his church’s “excellent job in meshing traditional values with religious principles.” He says it also “deliberately instills guilt.” Naipaul was engrossed with the Reverend Will Campbell, a theatrical, Yale-trained Baptist theologian from Mississippi who had “done brave things” in the cause of civil rights and yet, because of his transcending belief in Christ’s love for all persons, had even been led to “offer spiritual succor to the members of the Ku Klux Klan.” When a pharisaical type asked Will what the Christian message is, he replied, “We are all bastards, but God loves us anyway.” Also in this Bible-Belt assortment is Jack Leland, a Charleston Episcopalian who plans to leave \$2,000 to his church so that every year after spring service, drinks—“wine, whiskey, or whatever”—can be served. His tombstone will bear the line, “Have one on Jack.”

One of the inadequacies of this otherwise fascinating book is Naipaul’s tendency to quote at length without summary or interpretation. Since this material was first excerpted in the *New Yorker*, the answer may lie in that magazine’s penchant for transcribing baldly the endless dronings of the tape recorder. Some of the material also seems poorly transcribed. I was puzzled, for example, by this statement by a black member of the Atlanta School Board concerning segregated times: “Some places served blacks at the back window,” he said, “and when the cook knew his order was a back-window order he put on, if he were serving a hamburger, an extra piece of meat. This was the origin of the cheeseburger.” Any comments, Ronald McDonald?

At other times, he seems to be logging misinformation into that great, mixed-up Dixie data base. For example, a Charlestonian is quoted as saying “For some years blacks weren’t allowed to drive cars; they were thought to be reckless drivers.” This must have been a localized phenomenon; I have asked many fellow Southerners, and none had heard of it. “A black man taught me to drive,” one seventyish friend said. His wife, perhaps reminded of Atlantan Alfred Uhry’s *Driving Miss Daisy*, a therapeutic, anti-racist play about a Jewish lady and her black driver (which may run *forever* in Atlanta), added, “All the *chauffeurs* were black.” But the statement eliciting the most unbelieving hoots at dinner parties is Naipaul’s: “Not a day had passed since I had come to the South without my reading in the

newspapers about General Sherman, or hearing about him on television." None of my news-addicted friends can remember the *last* time the Great Incendiary's name appeared.

In Naipaul's purview, the South is still, as Mencken wrote, "A Sahara of the Beaux Arts"; he never mentions the area's vital regional theatres, concert halls, and art museums. Also, he meets authors, but avoids mentioning their books. One reads briefly, for example, of Al Murray, a Harlem-based writer, without learning of his superb travel memoirs, *South to a Very Old Place*, or his hip, electrical prose style that antedates Tom Wolfe. Still, V. S. Naipaul's "turn" as a travelling commentator on the South offers interesting insights and an extraordinarily wide range of Southern archetypes. There is even the hint that the "turn in the South" of his title may suggest a changing, perhaps a change for the better.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

EMILY GROSHOLZ spent the last year working on a third book of poetry on a grant from the Ingram Merrill Foundation and a Guggenheim fellowship. . . . Books by MONROE K. SPEARS include *The Poetry of W.H. Auden, Dionysus and the City*, and *American Ambitions*. . . . LOUIS SIMPSON's next book of poems, *In the Room We Share*, will be published by Paragon House in the spring of 1990. "Villa Selene" is part of the book. . . . PETER CORODIMAS* is an Associate Professor of English at the State University of New York at Plattsburgh. . . . GEORGE WATSON is a Fellow of St. John's College, Cambridge. His new book, *The Certainty of Literature*, is published by Simon & Schuster. . . . PATRICIA GOEDICKE's most recent book of poetry is a new and selected, *The Tongues We Speak* (Milkweed Editions). She teaches poetry in the Creative Writing Program of the University of Montana at Missoula, Montana. . . . ALICE FULTON's* most recent book of poems will be published by David R. Godine in 1990. . . . PATRICIA TERRY teaches in the Literature Department of the University of California at San Diego. Her forthcoming book of Old Norse Poetry, *Poems of the Elder Edda*, is due out from the University of Pennsylvania Press later this year. . . . J. ALLYN ROSSER has begun work on a book about Henry James. . . . MICHELE WOLF* was National Arts Club Scholar in Poetry at the Bread Loaf Writer's Conference in 1987. . . . During the summer MARCIA B. SIEGEL gave workshops on dance and dance criticism in Helsinki and Hong Kong. She also traveled and lectured in England, Indonesia, and the Philippines.

HAROLD FROMM and Cheryll Burgess are currently editing *Ecocriticism*, a collection of critical essays exploring the relations between literature and the environment. . . . TOM WILHELMUS has recently been promoted to full professor of English and Assistant Dean at the University of Southern Indiana at Evansville. . . . ANTHONY STORR is an Emeritus Fellow of Green College, Oxford, and Honorary Consulting Psychiatrist to the Oxfordshire Health Authority. His most recent book is *Freud* (Past Masters Series, Oxford University Press). . . . CATHERINE PETERS* *Thackeray's Universe* was published by Oxford University Press (New York) in 1987, and she is currently writing a biography of Wilkie Collins. She teaches English literature at Somerville College, Oxford. . . . JAMES FINN COTTER is working on a collection of his Hopkins essays, to be entitled *Kingdom of Daylight*. . . . BENJAMIN GRIFFITH* is a native Southerner and Emeritus Dean of the Graduate School, West Georgia College of the University of Georgia System. He is the author of *McIntosh and Weatherford, Creek Indian Leaders* (University of Alabama Press, 1988).

*Asterisk indicates a new contributor.

IN THIS ISSUE:

That a young French aristocrat who spent only nine months in the United States (1831-32), ostensibly to investigate the penal system, should produce at the age in thirty what is still the most penetrating interpretation of American government and society seems wildly improbable. Tocqueville was remarkable, however, in being both an aristocrat and a convinced democrat, believing firmly in the principles of the French Revolution as he interpreted it.

—Monroe K. Spears, "Tocqueville in 1989," p. 369.

I keep thinking about the murals in the Campo Santo. They were painted in the late fourteenth century, at the time of the Black Death. *The Triumph of Death* is a warning, with envy and malice behind it, to the people who are having a good time, listening to music, riding palfreys, and so on. There are three open coffins with putrefying bodies over which snakes or worms are crawling. Some ladies on horseback are looking into the coffins and one is holding her nose.

—Louis Simpson, "Villa Selene," p. 382.

Thirty years on, half-crazed and caged by his compatriots in a prison-compound near Pisa, Ezra Pound was to recall an English winter he had once spent with W.B. Yeats in 1913-14 by a waste moor in Sussex. It was at Stone Cottage in Coleman's Hatch, near East Grinstead; and "Uncle William" had been no easy companion, refusing to eat hot ham for his dinner because peasants do, and intoning his poetic triumphs in a voice like the winter wind.

—George Watson, "The Singular Friendship: Yeats and Pound at Stone Cottage," p. 421.